TRACKS IN THE SAND
A "Henry" Story . . by **W. C. TUTTLE**

Short Stories

25c

October 25th

Twice A Month

The Spanish Main

then . .

A RUBY FOR SOLITA
by
Arthur D. Howden Smith

and now . .

DEATH AT HISPANIOLA
William Du Bois

missing

missing

ACTION, ADVENTURE, MYSTERY

Short

Every author's finest and

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WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.* S. A. FRAZER, *Secretary.* D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*

BIGGEST AND BEST—TWICE A MONTH

Stories

latest stories—no reprints

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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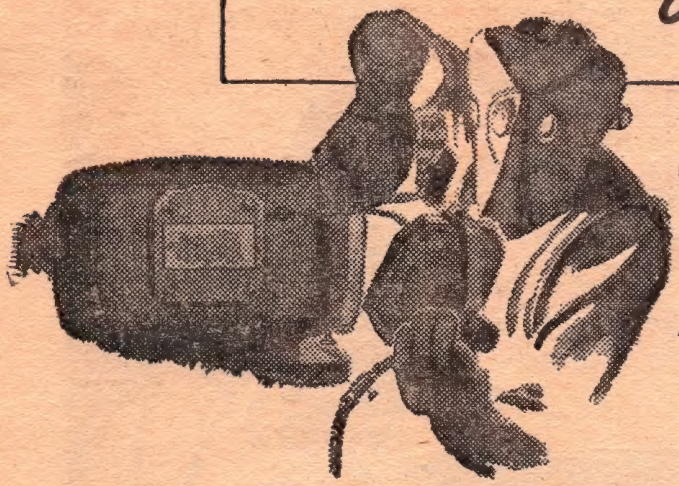
The Memory of an Atom



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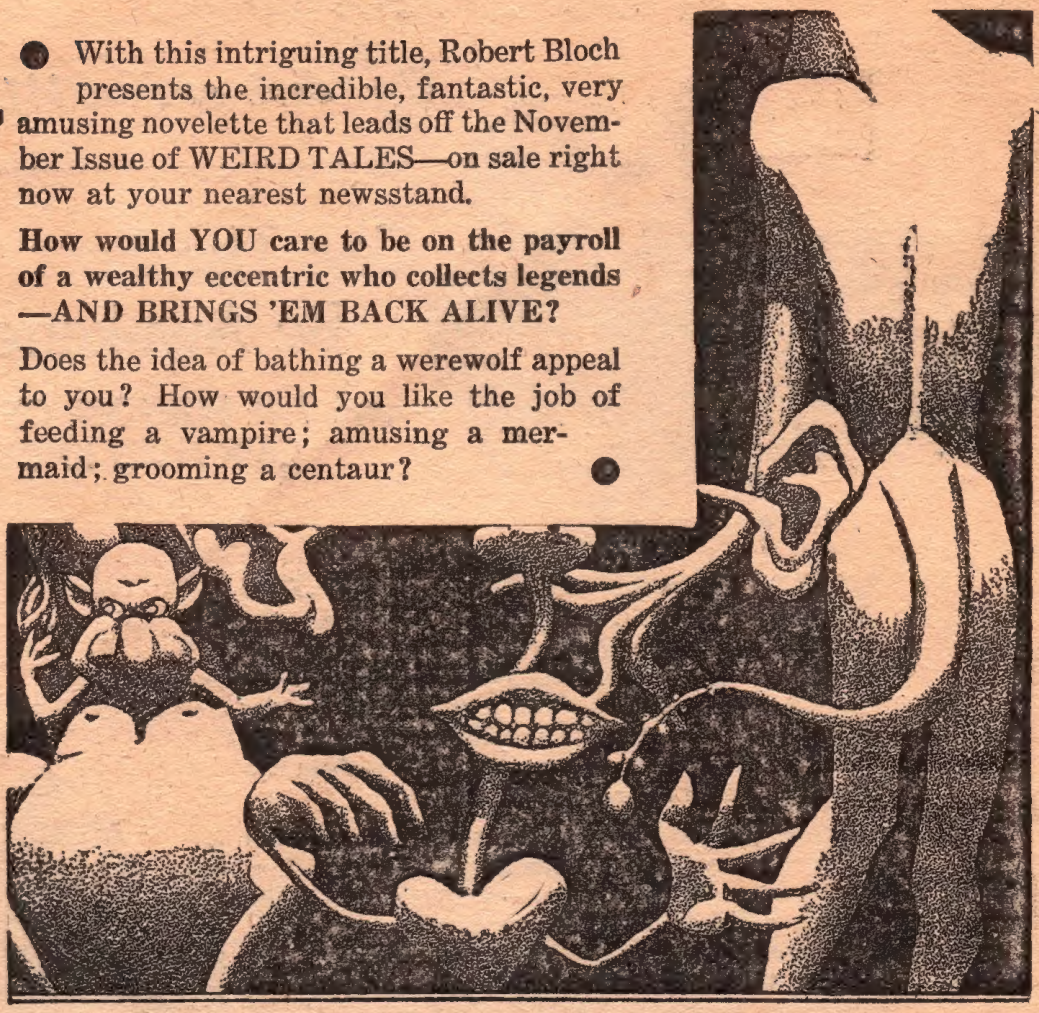

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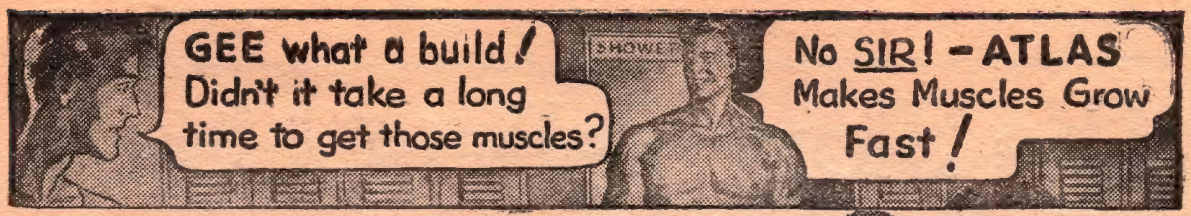

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The Story Tellers' Circle

The Right Flag

AS YOU will remember in July a large number of national magazines published the American flag on their covers as a matter of patriotism. It seems that only about 80 percent of the flags reproduced were true flags in accordance with the statutes of this country. We are glad to say that SHORT STORIES *cover was among that 80 percent.*

From One Contrib' to Another

"WE'RE just back from the Reunion at Vegas," S. Omar Barker wrote us the other day. "Good rodeo, good crowd, considering war conditions, and a good time. Also good and tired. I know ol' Tuttle don't need any fan letters, but I've just read 'The Lobo Trail' and sure enjoyed it. I sure get a kick out of the deft way that ol' cowboy handles his dialogue and the authenticity of his cowboy humor."

"S. Omar Barker."

Caribbean Pirates, Old and New

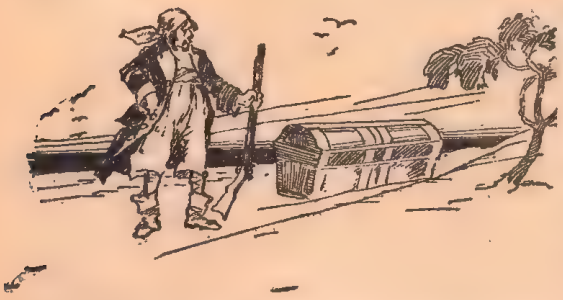
IN THIS issue we have two pirate stories —one of the heyday of the buccaneers, and one of today. A man who knows his pirates is Arthur D. Howden Smith, and he has a few words to say on the subject as follows:

There have been pirates, buccaneers and picaroons in the Caribbean—with the exception of one interval—ever since the first Spanish explorers and colonists pierced the dark curtain which the Time Spirit had hung between Europe and the Americas for no one knows how many millenia. For the early Spaniards were certainly as piratical in their depredations upon Indian tribes and nations as were the English, French and Dutch, who harried them in Long Diccon's day and for many years afterwards. Cuban, Colombian, Venezuelan, Brazilian and American pirates and slave-traders carried on the tradition until about a century ago. But from the period just prior to the Civil War piracy degenerated into filibustering and gun-running. I could tell some stories about that, but this isn't the time or the place for them.

Anyhow, for the past three generations people took it for granted that piracy in the Caribbean was nothing more than a memory. If you wanted to know about it, you had to go to such sources of information on the old days as Esquimiling, Stevenson, Sabatini or Howden Smith. But in the past year the pirates came back to their favorite cruising ground. With the difference that in this mid-Twentieth Century the pirates were Germans, crueler, more merciless and treacherous than Henry Morgan or Long John Silver. In their salt-crusted U-boats, lurking beneath the beautiful blue waters which stretch from the Straits of Florida to the Dragon's Mouth and from the Windward and Mona Passages to Yucatan and the coasts of the Spanish Main, they are prowling the Caribbean with the same blind zest for death and destruction as the men who wore top-boots and swung cutlasses. The pirates of several hundred years ago were used to forcing their victims to "walk the plank." It was no harder fate than has befallen many sailors of today, who have had their ships torpedoed under them without warning, and then been shelled in their hastily-launched lifeboats.

The old sea-rovers had their bases on the island of Tortuga off Haiti, in Port Royal and Kingston, Jamaica, at the Belize in British Honduras and many other places, some of them very secret. And the German U-boat pirates also undoubtedly have

their bases, *very* secret, amongst the thousands of uninhabited islands and lagoons in the Greater and Lesser Antilles and along the coasts of the Main. The word Main, by the way, never connoted the waters of the Caribbean, as so many readers of pirate stories seem to imagine. It was short for Mainland, the Spanish Mainland, that is, all the settled coasts of Central America, the Captain-Generalcy of New Granada (Colombia) and what is now Venezuela.



There is another difference between the old pirates and their German—and possibly—Italian successors. In the heyday of organized piracy, the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, its practitioners were not actuated by the lust for sheer destruction of propery which governs the U-boat crews. They attacked ships for the value of their cargoes, of which they disposed as best they could. Many of the more prudent of them kept the wealth they gained, and used it to set themselves up, ashore or afloat, as law-abiding citizens. Henry Morgan, as you remember, died a knight, Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica and the owner of a considerable landed property in that island. Even Long John Silver was represented by Stevenson as wanting Captain Flint's treasure so that he could buy "a coach-and-four and a seat in Parliament." The U-boat crews who escape the increasing campaign the United States is launching against them, in cooperation with the Allied Latin American nations, will return to a broken Germany and a reward of worthless paper marks. It doesn't look like profitable piracy in the long run.

One other distinction I should like to make. There was a rather vague, but none the less real, difference between pirates, as such, and buccaneers and picaroons. Pirates ravaged ships of all countries, including their own. The buccaneers, who petered out toward the beginning of the Seventeenth Century, and the picaroons, who lasted much longer, were inclined to restrict their attacks to the vessels of Spain and Portugal, actuated largely by the arbitrary limitations these two countries imposed upon trade with their American colonies. Long Diccon, strictly speaking, was no more a pirate than Sir Francis Drake. Like Drake and the Hawkinses, father and son, Sir Richard Grenville and many another great Elizabethan seaman, he waged what might be called private warfare. It was illegal, but confined to a nationalistic purpose, and for this reason more or less tolerated by his government.

Arthur D. Howden Smith.

Westward, Ever Westward

IT SEEMS that "Westerns" head the list of the stories most in demand in the libraries that accompany the American expeditionary forces. And that's a credit to the taste of young America, for according to the higher criticism the Western story is the most distinctly American contribution to the stream of English fiction. Well, SHORT STORIES had had the best of 'em in its pages—Hashknife Hartley, Hopalong Cassidy, Red Clark and a host of famous others are and have been in our pages.

For the Duration

FROM now on "The Ends of the Earth Club" is to be for civilians only. We have received a request — which, of course, is an order, with which we are only too glad to comply — from the Office of Censorship in Washington asking us to discontinue any encouragement of men of the armed forces to write to people they do not know. This is, of course, to avoid any danger of enemy agents using this advantage to receive news this way.

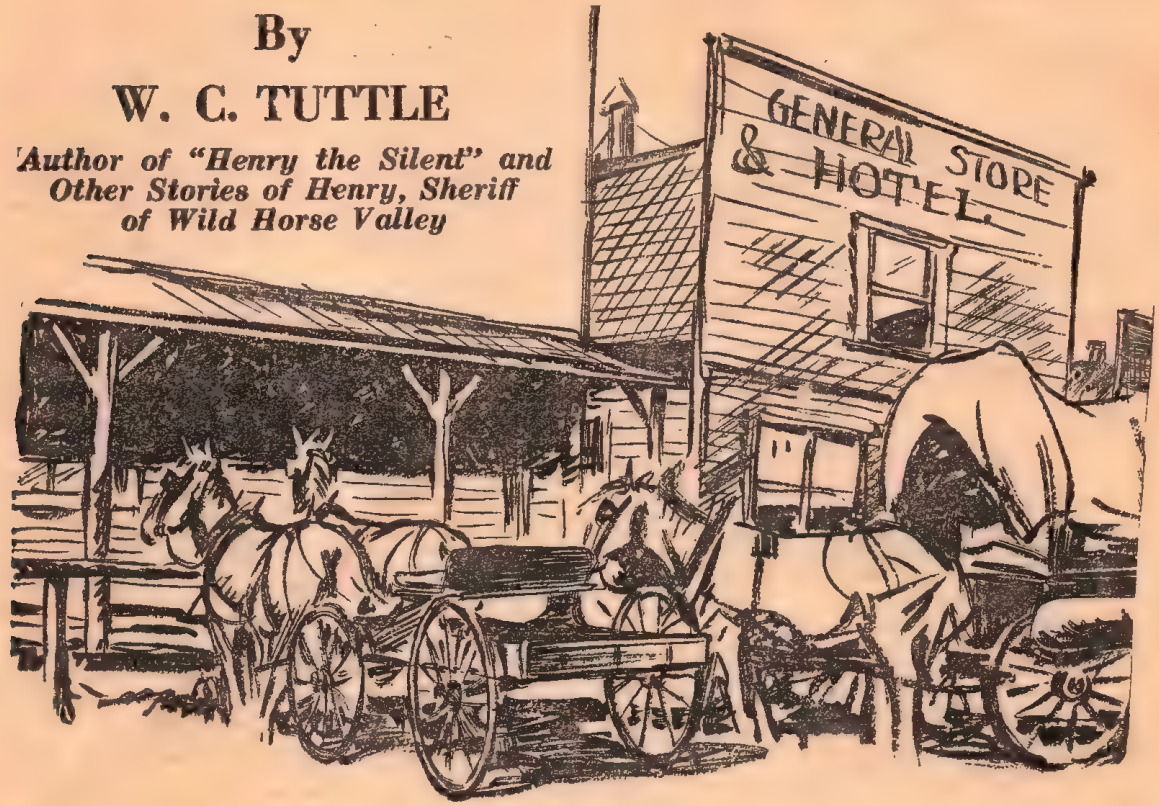
So from now on, no letters from men in the Services will appear in SHORT STORIES. *When the war is over we hope there will be lots of them, telling all about it. In the meantime, we hope to hear from lots of correspondents on the home front.*

TRACKS IN THE SAND

By

W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Henry the Silent" and Other Stories of Henry, Sheriff of Wild Horse Valley



I

"DOC" DARNELL, erstwhile Arizona mine promoter, Oklahoma oil promoter, and so on down the line, including confidence schemes, shell games and marked cards, spread his two hundred and twenty pounds of well-dressed avoirdupois on a bench in Golden Gate Park and wondered what was to be his next move to keep his bankroll from further shrinkage. And what Doc would do for a dollar would amaze anyone—excepting honest work.

Doc had a bland, open countenance. In fact, he was benign, with his gray hair, honest-looking eyes, and an habitual smile under his close-clipped gray mustache. But Doc Darnell belied his looks. The police had a name for him, and that name was Dangerous.

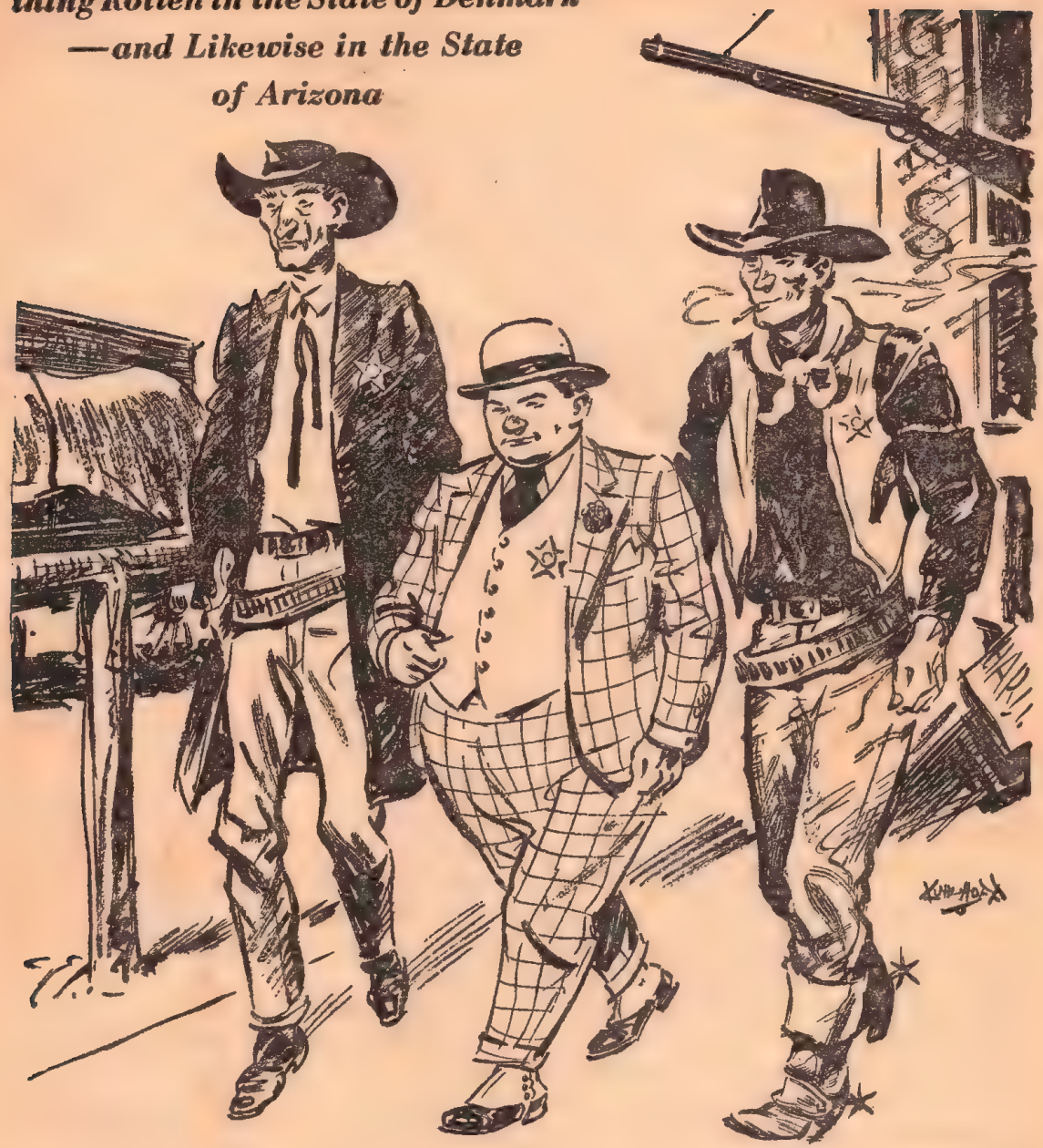
A squirrel came across the grass, leaped to the top of the bench and looked Doc over carefully. But Doc was not interested in the little animal. In one pudgy hand he held a newspaper, which he proceeded to unfold. On the front page was a large picture of a man in dinner clothes, and above the picture was the headline:

MILLIONAIRE TURNS GOAT-HERD AND WRECKS SWANKY NIGHT-CLUB

The story, loaded with humorous details, said that Frank Travis had loaded a borrowed truck with goats, taken them to a famous roadhouse, where, at the height of the midnight festivities, he had driven them into the place. Both goats and patrons, the paper said, became hysterical. A famous band leader was later removed from the depths of a kettle-drum, where a four-legged battering-ram had put him. Women had fainted, and the place was a scene of wild disorder. Travis, the millionaire, according to the police, had probably left town.

Doc Darnell knew Frank Travis. In fact, he had, at one time, selected Frank

Henry Felt That There Was Something Rotten in the State of Denmark —and Likewise in the State of Arizona



Travis as a victim, but the police recognized him too soon. He knew that Frank Travis had inherited several millions from his father. He was an orphan, nearly thirty years of age, a wild spender, who even refused to retain a law firm, because of the fact that they might advise him.

Doc Darnell also knew that quite recently this same Frank Travis had acquired ownership of the Shoshone Chief gold mine in Wild Horse Valley, Arizona, at which mine one of Doc's personal friends was general manager. It had been reported that Travis had paid nearly a half million for the Shoshone Chief. Doc closed his eyes and estimated what he could do with that much money. Travis' father had made his millions in mines; so it was quite natural that the son would look favorably upon mining investments.

Doc sighed and opened his eyes. Dreaming never put any gold into his pockets—but it was nice to dream, anyway. The squirrel cocked his head in-

quiringly, as Doc took a handkerchief from his pocket and removed a speck of dust from his left eye.

A MAN came sauntering past the bench and sat down on the next bench, where he proceeded to fill his pipe. He was not exactly down-at-the-heel in appearance, but did not look at all prosperous. He needed a shave, and his shoes had not been shined for days. He also looked as though a good meal under his belt might not be amiss.

But Doc Darnell was not so much interested in his outward appearance, as he was in the man's face. Slowly he unfolded the paper again and looked at the face of Frank Travis. He didn't need to do that, because he was very familiar with the face of Frank Travis. He folded the paper again, tucked it into a crack in the bench, and got slowly to his feet.

The squirrel had deserted Doc to go over to the newcomer, and the man seemed amused over the antics of the little fellow. He looked up as Doc approached.

"Friendly little devil," he remarked.

"Ah, yes," replied Doc. "They are always begging for nuts."

"Very likely recognized me at first glance," said the younger man soberly.

"Very good!" chuckled Doc. "Lovely day, my friend."

"I really hadn't noticed," he replied, poking a finger at the squirrel.

Doc took a long, black cigar from his pocket and carefully lighted it. A closer view of this man's face had caused Doc's blood-pressure to climb several points. The resemblance to Frank Travis was remarkable.

"Haven't we met before?" he asked. The man looked sharply at him, but shook his head.

"Sorry," he said. "I'm a stranger here."

"Remarkable resemblance to a friend of mine," said Doc.

A mounted policeman came along. Doc became engrossed in his nails, and he noticed that this stranger did not look up, until after the horse and rider had gone on. Could it be, he wondered, that this man was also just a bit police-shy. Finally Doc said:

"Are you working here in San Francisco?"

"Jobs," replied the man, "are pretty scarce."

"That's right," agreed Doc. "No work —no eat."

The man looked closely at Doc. "You haven't missed many meals," he said.

"A smart man eats," smiled Doc. "I do not work—but I eat."

"A smart man, eh?" mused the stranger aloud. "Maybe I'm not smart."

"Maybe," suggested Doc, "you haven't thought along the right channels."

"Such as?" suggested the man quietly.

Doc puffed thoughtfully for several moments. Then he said, "As I diagnose your case, my friend, you are a stranger here, out of work, nearly out of money. Am I right?"

"You said nearly," reminded the stranger.

Doc laughed quietly. "Did you ever hear of Doc Darnell?" he asked.

"Sorry, but it doesn't click in my brain. Who is he?"

"I am Doc Darnell."

"Medico, tooth carpenter or horse doctor?"

"No, no, my friend—none of them," laughed Doc. He moved closer on the bench, although the nearest ears were on a baby and her nursemaid, two hundred feet away.

"Would you," queried Doc, "like to make a fortune—very quickly?"

"And if I did," replied the stranger, "how much of it would I enjoy outside of prison walls?"

"Very, very well put!" exclaimed Doc. "You have brains, my friend."

"Possibly an instinct to remain free, Doctor."

"We all have this instinct," smiled Doc.

"You and I are not the kind to go blindly into a thing. But when Doc Darnell steps into a situation, my friend, there is nothing to fear from the law. Can you act a part?"

The man laughed. "So you are promoting a play, Doctor?"

"I am not, sir. But as the immortal Bard put it so aptly—"

"I know! but usually the characters are miscast, Doctor."

"True, true. Wait a moment."

Doc went back to the bench and secured the paper, which he took back and opened it to the front page.

"You have a mirror," he said. "Look at that face."

The man studied the picture, rubbed his stubbled chin and handed the paper back to Doc.

"It does look a little like me," he admitted. "But newspaper pictures are never very accurate."

"I know Frank Travis," said Doc, "and you look like him. In fact, the resemblance is remarkable. You, my friend, could double for Frank Travis."

"Who is this Frank Travis, Doctor?"

In a few words Doc Darnell outlined Frank Travis. The man smiled.

"The interesting part," he said, "is the fact that Travis has a million dollars, and in that respect all resemblance between us has faded. It is nice to know that I look like a moneyed man, Doctor. But you spoke about making a fortune—quickly."

"Ah, yes—a fortune. How quickly?" Doc shrugged his shoulders. "It takes a little time to work out a plan. It must be fool-proof, this plan, my friend; but the reward—" Doc licked his lips in anticipation—"will be worth all of it. Would you—" Doc hesitated thoughtfully, "be willing to be Frank Travis? And if there was no Frank Travis—later, of course—would you mind being Frank Travis—always?"

"Let me get this straight," said the stranger, no longer smiling. "You ask me to masquerade as another man. Then you add a hint that this other man might cease to exist. Doctor, I don't go in for murder."

"Tut, tut, man!" said the Doctor hastily. "Nothing like it. You merely play the part. My friend, it means a million dollars to us. Ease and comfort, with every luxury—for life."

"That sounds all right. In fact, it sounds crazy. What is the deal?"

"Not so fast, my friend. You are interested, it seems."

"You spoke of a million dollars," reminded the stranger.

"Or more," added Doc. "What is your name?"

"You quoted the Bard of Avon," smiled the stranger. "I will reply, What's in a name? Make it Smith, if you must have a name."

"Ah, yes—Smith. Frank Smith, perchance?"

"If you want it that way, Doctor. What next?"

"Just this, Smith. Is there anyone liable to pop up and recognize you, or any relative—"

"Rest your mind on that," smiled the man. "There is no one."

"Good! Where are you living?"

"In a dump down on the Embarcadero. But I can go with you at—"

"No, no! We must not be seen together. Here is a little money, Smith."

Doc Darnell took a ten-dollar bill from a thin billfold and gave it to him.

"I'll gamble that much on your integrity, Smith," he said. "Meet me here a week from today, at this time, and everything will be settled."

"Thanks, Doc; I'll be here. That deal looks too good for me to miss."

"Good! Don't make any friends, Smith. Keep away from people. I'll see you a week from today."

"If I'm out of jail—I'll be here, Doc. So long."

Doc took the newspaper over to a rub-

bish box dumped it inside and went away, deep in thought. It was almost too good to be true. For once in his life he had given up a ten-dollar bill—gladly.

IT WAS about three weeks after that meeting in Golden Gate Park, when Henry Harrison Conroy, sheriff of Wild Horse Valley, and "Judge" Van Treece, the deputy, stood at a bar in Scorpion Bend and had one more drink, before starting the long trip to Tonto City. A queer pair of peace officers, these two. Henry was short and with an ample girth, a very red nose, and a moon-like countenance, while Judge was six feet, four inches in height, very thin, and with a long, lean face, long nose and huge, bushy eyebrows. It was the face of an undertaker or tragedian. Judge was past sixty.

Together with Oscar Johnson, a giant Swede, they made up what the Scorpion Bend *Clarion* was pleased to call "The Shame of Arizona." For most of his fifty-odd years Henry Harrison Conroy had been well known in legitimate shows and vaudeville. Featuring his red nose and a droll ability at juggling, he made millions laugh. But when vaudeville waned, Henry was nearly broke and entirely discouraged. It was then that an uncle he had never known died and left him the JHC Ranch in Wild Horse Valley.

With no knowledge of the West, Henry came to claim his inheritance. His rather extreme raiment, including spats and a gold-headed cane, amazed and amused Arizona. His courtly manners and droll humor appealed to them. He had only been there long enough to establish a residence, when a county election was held. One cowboy intimated that he was going to write Henry's name on the ballot for sheriff. The idea spread quickly, and Henry swept the country.

He realized that it had started as a joke. Well, if Wild Horse Valley liked a joke, he would go along with the idea, and appoint Judge Van Treece as his deputy. Drink had made Judge a dignified derelict, but had ruined a promising career as a criminal lawyer. His manner of getting drunk appealed to Henry, who also had a thirst. To add to the joke, Henry made Oscar Johnson, the giant Swede the jailer.

Wild Horse Valley was no place for weakling officers. The discovery of huge gold deposits down there changed Tonto City from a sleepy cow-town to a wild mining camp, with all its attending vices. But in some way, Henry and his crew operated efficiently. No one knew why, but they did. It was very evident that they did not in any way resemble the popular conception of Arizona peace officers. Judge invariably wore a long, rusty Prince Albert coat, stringy black ties and a flat-top, black sombrero. Except when riding he encased his feet in elastic-top shoes, the kind known as Congress gaiters.

On his infrequent trips to Scorpion Bend Henry usually wore a tailored suit, which fitted like the skin on a sausage, a derby hat—and those spats. Just now they stood at the bar, facing each other. It was nearly midnight.

"My wish for a very good health to you, sir," bowed Henry soberly.

"Thank you, sir," murmured Judge. "And to you, sir—a health."

They touched glasses again, bowed soberly and drank. The bartender turned away to hide a chuckle. That sort of thing might go on for hours. The men around the roulette wheel turned to smile.

A PAIR of Mexicans came into the saloon. One of them halted near the doorway, while the other came slowly up to the bar, knocked his hat off in an attempted military salute, and said:

"Senor, eetees meedsnight; the boggy waits weethout."

"Without what, my good servant?" queried Henry soberly.

"I be damn eef you know," replied Lightning Mendoza. "That ees w'at you

tell me to say, eef I am not meestaken—I hope."

"Perfectly correct, my good man," nodded Henry. "If you are ready, Judge, we will proceed home."

Judge hiccoughed slightly, adjusted his hat, and nodded.

"We will away, sir," he said solemnly. "Precede me, Henry."

Soberly and in single-file they left the saloon. Thunder Mendoza, the other Mexican, held back and fell in behind Lightning. A babel of conversation and laughter broke out after their exit. The four men went to the saloon hitch-rack, where a buckboard and team awaited them.

"I theenk I drive," suggested Lightning.

"Your thoughts, my good man, are far astray," replied Henry. "Those narrow grades around Lobo Canyon need a strong and steady man at the lines. I shall do the driving tonight."

"I was afraid of that, sir," sighed Judge. "Strong and steady! My, my!"

"I have never dropped you into that canyon yet, Judge," reminded Henry, as they settled into the buckboard seat, with the two Mexicans sitting in the back, their feet over the rear.

"Frijole Beel ees say that I am bes' driver you ever saw, I expect," suggested Lightning.

"Have done!" ordered Henry, and then swung the team around in the middle of the street, nearly upsetting the buckboard.

WITHIN a few yards that team was running at top speed, and they went out of town in a shower of gravel, with Judge hanging onto his hat with both hands. Henry let them run.

There was only the stars and a faint crescent moon to guide them, but Henry felt that the horses would keep on the road, and that the run would be all out of them, before they reached Lobo Canyon. The buckboard rocked and swayed dangerously, but they were outrunning the clouds of dust, churned up by the eight hoofs and the four wheels.

Henry took off his derby hat and put it between his feet. Judge said:

"Henry, are you showing off—or haven't you the lines in your possession?"

"I have the lines, sir, and I am in complete control."

"Then demonstrate, Henry! Thunder fell out, and is running behind, clinging to Lightning's feet."

Henry checked the team long enough for the exhausted Thunder to regain the buckboard.

"I'm bomps out," panted Thunder. "I'm grab something and those are my leetle brodder's foot."

"Damned reckless driving, if you care for my opinion," said Judge.

"I never have cared for it," replied Henry, "so I do not see why I should make any exception at this time. All set Thunder?"

"I theenk sometheeng ees on fires!" exclaimed Lightning.

"Possibly Thunder's feet?" suggested Judge gravely.

"No, no, up the road!" blurted Lightning. "Sometheeng burn, I theenk."

Judge and Henry turned in the seat. About a quarter of a mile up the road, and off to the left, flames were piling above the mesquite.

"That old prospector's shack up there against the mesa," exclaimed Judge. "It is on some of the old road, Henry!"

"Hang on!" shouted Henry, and away they went. Henry knew where the old road intersected with a more recent highway, and was swinging his galloping steeds to the left, the buckboard careening on two wheels, when he caught a flash of two riders, almost into them.

Guns blasted from the hands of the two riders, the team whirled wider, skidding the buckboard against a mesquite thicket, where it proceeded to upset. Henry landed in a sitting position in the sand, dazed from the impact with the earth. The

team went on for fifty yards, where they tied up in more mesquite, and proceeded to kick everything in reach.

Henry staggered out to the road and looked around. The dim figure of Judge came limping down the road, his voice reeking with complaint as he stated painfully.

"You *will* fasten those lines together, Henry! How many times have I told you to not buckle them?"

"This," gasped Henry, "is no time for arithmetic, Judge. Are you all right?"

"Being dragged with one foot caught in the loop of a pair of damned lines is not my idea of a healthful exercise, sir. What happened? Did I or did I not see and hear shots fired at us?"

"You certainly did, Judge. Hah! Smell that smoke! Kerosene! Where are Thunder and Lightning?"

"Yoo-hoo!" called a voice weakly. "How am I, you hope and trus'?"

"Are you all right, Lightning?" asked Henry anxiously.

"Sure—all right. But I'm can' gets down. One foots ees high as your head and you can' get heem loose."

"Hung up in the mesquite," groaned Judge. "Where is Thunder?"

"I am seeting on heem," said Lightning blandly.

"Is he hurt?"

"I'm don' theenk so; he don' keek about notheeng."

They tore their way through and managed to rescue the two Mexicans. Thunder was unable to talk for awhile, but he soon recovered. They untangled the team and examined the buckboard, which was little the worse for wear. With everything on an even keel again, they tied the team and limped up to the burning shack, which was more than half consumed. It was an old, tinder-dry, one-room dwelling, which had not been occupied for years, as far as they knew. There was still a decided odor of kerosene in the smoke, indicating that the shack had been deliberately fired.

Henry and Judge were puzzled. Why would two men fire the old shack, and then shoot at them? Was there something in the shack that they wished to destroy? And did they fire the shots to distract the occupants of the buckboard from any chance of recognition? It was rather puzzling.

Henry walked around the fire, looking at it from every angle, but was unable, on account of the heat, to get very close.

"You have no idea of the identity of the two riders, Judge?" asked Henry.

"Have you?" countered Judge.

"Have you, my leetle brodder?" asked Lightning, anxious to say something.

"Have I wheech?" queried Thunder.

"Me, too," said Lightning. "I never see anybody."

"We were facing the light," said Henry. "Judge, I believe they recognized us."

"Undoubtedly," said Judge dryly, but added, "Unless they are the sort of persons who go around, taking pot-shots at total strangers. Gad, my rheumatism is killing me! This job is almost a guarantee against old age. I can hardly bend my left knee."

"No wonder!" exclaimed Henry. "You have a mesquite snag run up your left pant-leg."

Judge sat down, while Lightning pulled the snag out. It made the left leg of Judge decidedly more supple, but did not help his disposition, because the pant-leg was ruined. They limped back to the buckboard. Judge groaned, as he climbed into the seat.

"More rheumatism?" asked Henry.

"No," replied Judge, "I was merely visualizing our ride around Lobo grades, with you at the lines."

"Cowardice ill becomes a deputy sheriff, sir," said Henry soberly.

"At our ages, Henry, we should use our accumulated wisdom."

"Senility has not reached me as yet, Judge," replied Henry. "And as for my driving ability—I am still alive."

"Due to the grace of God, and the fact

that you landed on the seat of your pants in the sand—yes—but no thanks to your ability as a driver. I ask you in all sincerity—drive carefully for the rest of the way."

"Well," sighed Henry, "I suppose I *have* had my fling. Be of good cheer, my friend, as we plod our weary way homeward. Are you ready, boys?"

"Let heem go," said Lightning. "I'm mak' bet weeth Thonder. The firs' one fall off lose *uno peso.*"

"No shove," warned Thunder.

"Good men with stout hearts," laughed Henry, as he swung the team around, narrowly missing another upset, and they headed for Tonto City again.

But as they turned to the left on the main road, they saw, in the dim light, a man staggering toward them. Henry drew up quickly, as the man almost bumped into their team. Henry handed the lines to Judge and got out. The man stopped and by the light of a match Henry discovered that he was Johnny Riley, manager of the livery-stable in Scorpion Bend. He was hatless, his face streaked with half-dried blood, due to a cut on the left side of his head.

"What in the world happened to you, Johnny?" asked Henry.

"I dunno," replied Johnny dazedly. "Where's my horse and buggy?"

"We haven't seen any horse and buggy," replied Henry. "You recognize me, do you not, Johnny?"

"Why, shore—yo're the sheriff. I know you. But I'll be danged if I know what became of my horse and buggy."

"Where were you going, Johnny?"

"Going? Oh, yeah. Gee, I must have forgot. Why—why, I was takin' a man to Tonto City. That's right. Two men stopped us. That's funny—where's the man?"

"Who was this man, Johnny?" asked Henry quietly.

"I don't know. He—he said somethin' about ownin' a mine. Yeah, that was it."

"Did he," asked Judge, "say his name was Frank Travis?"

"No, he didn't tell me his name."

"Frank Travis?" queried Henry. "Judge that is the new owner of the Shoshone Chief. What made you think—"

"It was in the *Clarion,*" interrupted Judge. "I read it today. Just a short article, saying that Frank Travis would arrive tonight. I paid little attention, because—"

"Get in, Johnny," said Henry. "There is room between Judge and myself. You need a doctor. I guess we may as well stay all night in Scorpion Bend, as it will soon be morning, anyway. Are you feeling better, Johnny?"

"No," replied Johnny earnestly, "I don't. I wish I knew where that horse and buggy went."

"Did you," asked Judge, "get a good look at this man, Johnny?"

"Nope. It wasn't very light in the stable. He said he just came in on the train. Had a valise, I know that much. The boss will sure give me hell, if anythin' happens to that horse and buggy."

"Do not fret about the horse and buggy," advised Henry.

"Well, my Lord!" exclaimed Johnny. "What became of the man I had?"

"That," replied Henry, "is of more importance than a horse and buggy."

JAMES WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW PELLY, editor and owner of the Scorpion Bend *Clarion,* was not an impressive figure, as he sat at his littered desk, tapping his teeth with a pencil, as he tried to figure out an editorial for his next issue. He was scrawny, near-sighted, and usually ink-stained, and very proud of his ability to spread vitriol via his editorials. There was no love lost between himself and the sheriff's office of Tonto City, and J. W. L. Pelly never overlooked an opportunity to comment caustically on the operations of that office.

There had been no visible crime in Wild

Horse Valley for months, and Mr. Pelly was hard-put for anything to write about. Deep in thought, he heard the outer door close softly, but did not look up. He knew that someone was standing at the little counter. Pelly wrote a few words at random on a piece of old paper. Finally he looked around.

Henry Harrison Conroy was behind the counter, idly surveying the establishment and paying no attention to the editor. Pelly's lips drew into a thin line. He had never been able to exchange quips with Henry.

Finally Henry said quietly, "Nice place you have here, Mr. Pelly. It would be interesting to see what one might find below the surface. A good cleaning might disclose—"

"Was there something you *wanted*, Mr. Conroy?" asked Pelly.

"Ah, yes," sighed Henry. "In this so-called newspaper you publish there was an item to the effect that one Frank Travis, new owner of the Shoshone Chief mine, was due to arrive here yesterday evening."

"Yes, I printed that item."

"Thank you, sir; you are very frank. Would it be presuming to ask where you received such information?"

"It would," nodded Pelly.

"I see. That, of course, is merely your reply to a citizen. As sheriff of Wild Horse Valley, I demand a full and complete explanation as to where you received such information."

"Oh!" said Pelly. "Well," he sighed deeply, searched his desk-top and came up with a letter, which he gingerly handed to Henry.

IT BORE an ornate heading, Frank Travis Properties, San Francisco, California. Apparently written as publicity, it stated that Frank Travis, owner of the Shoshone Chief mine, would arrive at Scorpion Bend on this date, on his way to Tonto City, where he expected to plan improvements in machinery for a complete exploitation of the newly acquired mine. It was not signed.

Henry nodded and gave the note back to Pelly, who was curious to know what Henry wanted with such unimportant information.

"Did Mr. Travis arrive?" asked Pelly.

"I have no information, sir," replied Henry. "A man arrived. He started for Tonto City in a livery vehicle, driven by Johnny Riley. Past midnight last night I found Johnny Riley wandering on the road, suffering from a beating at the hands of someone. His companion disappeared. Johnny remembers very little. Men are now searching for the horse and buggy and the missing man."

Pelly drew a deep breath. "Frank Travis is a millionaire," he said.

"That fact," said Henry soberly, "will probably protect him from all harm. Well, good day, sir."

"Wait a minute!" blurred Pelly. "What is your office doing about it?"

"Nothing for publication," replied Henry. "Please leave my name out of it, Mr. Pelly; I am a very modest man, and I do not care to have my name in the paper. In addition to that, sir, I may say that it is none of your infernal business. Good day, sir."

Henry joined Judge and the two Mexicans on the main street, and they rode out to the burned shack, which was now only a heap of ashes. Two men rode in and reported that the horse and buggy had been found, but no trace of the missing man. Henry nodded soberly and stared at the ashes.

"Yuh don't think he'd be—in that, do yuh?" asked one of the men.

"I'm wondering, boys," replied Henry. "Take your ropes, tie them to each end of that old fence rail, and one of you ride on each side of that pile of ashes. I believe the pole is heavy enough to scatter the ashes."

The two cowboys quickly obeyed the suggestion, and after a couple of attempts

dragged out the charred remains of what had once been a man. At least, it had once been a human being, but now burned beyond any possibility of identification.

A wagon was secured, and the body taken back to Scorpion Bend, where it was turned over to a doctor. There was no doubt in Henry's mind that the remains was that of the man Johnny Riley had started with to Tonto City. James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly rubbed his hands in anticipation of a mystery, which the sheriff could not handle, and which would give him plenty of opportunity to again flay the Shame of Arizona.

"What a story!" he gloated. "A millionaire murdered and burned. Or don't you believe this is the body of Frank Travis, Mr. Sheriff?"

"Millionaires burn practically as readily as a poor man, I believe," replied Henry. "If you can identify that incinerated remains as the body of Mr. Travis, you have a story. However, you have a flair for being a bit premature, Mr. Pelly —and if I may say so, sir, a decided leaning toward journalistic inaccuracies; so what you may write about this will not in any way surprise your few readers."

"Some day," said Pelly icily, "I shall drive you out of office."

"I hope it will be a nice day," said Henry blandly. "I should hate to attend your funeral in the rain, Mr. Pelly."

"I can use just such a statement," said Pelly.

"Verbatim, I hope," smiled Henry. "It will please nearly everyone in Wild Horse Valley. Good day, Mr. Pelly."

II

NUMBER 79 was an hour late into Scorpion Bend that night. Doc Darnell and his protege from Golden Gate Park were on that train. This man, to be known as Frank Travis, was well-dressed, and his baggage was of the very latest.

"Just one more leg to this journey," said Doc Darnell, as they walked down the main street to the stage depot. "This stage trip from here to Tonto City is nothing to brag about."

"I can stand it," replied Travis. "Do any of these people know you?"

"Some," admitted Doc. "Down here they know me as a mining engineer, as I told you. They accept you at face value in Arizona, my boy. Don't worry about a thing. You are bringing me here to expert the Shoshone Chief."

"More truth than poetry in that," said Travis dryly. "Expert is right!"

They came to the lighted stage depot and turned off the street. There was a woman standing at the counter, and she turned toward them, as Travis came in ahead of Doc. Her bags were on the floor beside her. Travis halted and looked sharply at her. She was modestly dressed in a gray traveling suit, with a perky little hat on her head, and Travis thought she was quite the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

But she was staring past him at the doorway, as though transfixed. He looked back, but there was no sign of Doc Darnell.

Then the girl blinked and looked away for a moment, but again looked toward the doorway. Her gloved hands were clenched at her sides.

"I beg your pardon," said Travis quietly, "but can you tell me when the stage leaves for Tonto City?"

"I—" The girl looked at Travis for the first time. "Oh! I beg your pardon, I— I didn't realize—"

"The stage," stated a masculine voice from a rear room, "left an hour ago. Yore train was too late for him to wait."

"Time and the Tonto stage waits for no man," smiled Travis, as he placed his two bags on the floor.

"Who was that man with you?" asked the girl.

"With me?" queried Travis. "Oh, you mean the man who was behind me? Why,

I believe his name is—er—Jones. That's it—Cyrus Jones."

"Cyrus Jones?"

"Yes. You were saying that you wanted to go to Tonto City?"

"More than anything," she replied earnestly. "That train was an hour late, and it is absolutely necessary for me to be in Tonto City tomorrow morning. It means so very much, don't you see?"

"No," replied Travis, "I don't see, because I haven't the slightest idea why you have to be there. However, I want to be there, too. Now, it might be possible to secure a vehicle in which to make the trip."

The clerk at the depot had been listening, and now he said, "Yuh can hire a rig at the livery stable. It's across the street."

"Thank you very much," said Travis.

"I would pay my part of the expenses," said the girl.

"Naturally," said Travis dryly. "Shall we try it?"

Johnny Riley was willing to rent them the livery rig. Johnny, whose head was swathed in bandages, said, "I started to take a man to Tonto City last night, and danged near got killed. I reckon they killed the man I was with."

"Don't they want folks to go to Tonto City?" asked Travis anxiously.

"I dunno," replied Johnny. "I'll have that horse hitched in a jiffy."

The girl and Travis stood in the livery stable doorway and waited. There was no sign of Doc Darnell, and Travis wondered what had become of him. Finally the girl said, "My name is Nola Terry."

"Thank you," said Travis. "My name is Frank Travis. I'm from San Francisco, California, and I am very glad to meet you, Miss Terry."

Johnny drove the horse and buggy out to the doorway, and Travis said, "Aren't you going to drive the horse for us?"

"Can't do it, Mister," replied Johnny. "I've got the place alone tonight. That's a right gentle horse, and you won't have any trouble."

"I can drive," said Nola.

"You can? By jove, that's fine. I never have. That will pay your part of the expenses."

He handed Johnny a piece of currency and told him to keep the change.

"But, Mister," said Johnny, "you gave me—"

"I know," interrupted Travis. "That's all right, my boy."

"Gee, that's swell. Mind givin' me yore name, Mister? I've got to have it for the book, yuh see."

"My name is Frank Travis."

"Frank—hu-u-uh?"

"Travis, T-r-a-v-i-s."

"Holy Henhawks! Why—why, they said that was the name of the man who got killed last night!"

"Who said that?" asked Travis quickly.

"Well, you was supposed to come in on the train—and they thought—"

"They did, eh? Then what happened?"

"Well, the man came here to the stable and I was takin' him to Tonto City, but two men stuck us up and hit me over the head. This mornin' the sheriff dug the burned body of a man out of a shack. Somebody set fire to the shack last night. And they thought it was the body of Frank Travis."

Travis was silent for several moments. Then he said, "Could you describe that man to me, son?"

"I didn't get a good look at him, but I think his hair was kinda gray on the sides, and he had sort of a long nose."

"I see-e-e," said Travis quietly "Thank you very much."

HE CLIMBED in beside Nola, and they drove out of Scorpion Bend.

For a mile or more Travis was too preoccupied to talk, but finally he said: "The moonlight is beautiful, Miss Terry. In fact, I have never seen it so blue as it is out here. Do you live out here?"

"I have never been here before in my life," she replied. "I am from Chicago. I taught grade school in a little town outside Phoenix, where the salary was very small, but I stayed to the end of the term. I had applications in everywhere, and when I was about ready to give up, I got a letter from Tonto City. But in order to get the position, I must be there in the morning. So you can see that my need was urgent, Mr. Travis."

"Yes, I can see how urgent it must be," he agreed.

"I shall never forget your kindness in helping me to be there," she said.

"That is nothing."

"It means a living for me, Mr. Travis. Is this your first trip down here?"

"Yes." Travis laughed shortly. "I expected to see hard-faced women and Indian squaws—and I saw you."

Nola laughed. "But all women in Arizona are not hard-faced, Mr. Travis. I have seen many beautiful women in Arizona."

"And I," said Travis, "have only seen one. By the way, you asked about the man who was behind me at the stage depot. Do you know him?"

"For a moment I thought I did. But he moved away so quickly. I knew a man once who looked like him; a man without an ounce of manhood, and with the predatory instincts of a coyote."

Nola clucked to the horse, and they went up the long winding road to the top of the mesa. Nothing was said until they reached the top, where she drew up the horse for a breathing spell.

"You are a fine driver," he said. "Where did you learn?"

"I was raised on a farm. I drove a team when I was ten."

"That was wonderful. We were speaking about the man you disliked. What was that man's name?"

"James Wilton. He married my mother. My father had sold a big farm, and we moved to Chicago, where he made some fine investments. When he passed away, he left everything to mother. We were well off. But James Wilton came along. He was very rich, he said. He married my mother, and through trickery beat her out of every cent, and then disappeared. That was twelve years ago. Mother died. She couldn't stand poverty. I was twelve years old. Since that time I have made my own way in the world, Mr. Travis—and it hasn't been easy."

"That was tough," said Travis quietly. "His name was James Wilton, and he looked like the man who was behind me. Could he have recognized you, Miss Terry? I mean, if he was James Wilton."

"Possibly." But I suppose it was a trick of the light, or my imagination."

"Possibly."

"You said his name was Cyrus Jones, Mr. Travis."

"After all," replied Travis, "names mean little."

"No, that is true. Well, we better go on if we expect to be there by morning. Wasn't it queer that they should report your death in Scorpion Bend this morning?"

Frank Travis was silent for several moments, and then he said, "Do you mind if I smoke, Miss Terry? I think better at that time."

"I do not mind it in the least."

"Thank you. Yes, it is queer—me being dead. I can't quite understand it."

"Could there be two Frank Travises?" she asked innocently.

"Two? Why, I—yes, I suppose it is possible. Rather a coincidence that two men of the same name should come to Scorpion Bend within twenty-four hours of each other—both heading for Tonto City. They mistook someone else for me because the newspaper said I would be in last night."

"And killed the wrong man?" asked Nola fearfully.

"I never thought of that," said Frank Travis. "I wonder."

III

IN ORDER to catch up on their sleep, Henry and Judge slept at the JHC ranch.

Not long after daybreak they were awakened by an unearthly squawk, and sat up in bed to behold Bill Shakespeare, the rooster, sitting on the foot of their bed. Bill was tall and scrawny, and almost entirely out of feathers. As Henry and Judge sat up in bed, Bill gave another convulsive squawk and fell backward, hitting the bare floor with a dull thud.

"Bill," said Henry quietly, "seems indisposed."

Bill apparently got up, because he stalked out in the middle of the room and fell down again. Then he got up and proceeded to walk squarely into the wall near the doorway and fell down again.

"That, sir," said Judge, "should be an object lesson. Bill Shakespeare has been eating Frijole Bill's prune whiskey mash again. An innocent rooster is the victim of acute alcoholism. What a pity!"

"What abject bliss!" exclaimed Henry. "Not a care in the world. Probably dreaming that he is an eagle—or perhaps an ostrich."

"Rooster dreaming!" snorted Judge. "Bah!"

Henry chuckled. "One more tilt with a wildcat, and Shakespeare will be entirely nude."

"Do you believe Frijole's lies about Bill Shakespeare and the wildcat?" asked Judge.

"Absolutely."

"You are a bigger fool than I thought. Frijole is the biggest liar unhung."

Frijole appeared in the doorway, half-dressed. Frijole Bill Cullison was past sixty, little and scrawny, with a mustache entirely too large for his small face. Soaking wet, and with all his clothes on, he might weigh a hundred pounds. Frijole Bill was the cook at the JHC, but spent most of his time distilling prunes, to which he added anything handy, even to horse liniment.

"And how is the latest batch of whiskey?" asked Henry.

"That bunch," declared Frijole, "is the *e pluribus perotinitis* of all I've ever made. It atchellay snapped at me when I bottled it. It's as soft as a baby's carress and as devilish as an Apache full of gin. Henry, you've never tasted anythin' like it."

Slim Pickins came and peered over Frijole's shoulder. Slim was six feet four inches tall, with a long, lean face, an acrobatic Adam's-apple, and a prodigious thirst. Slim had just ridden in from Tonto City.

"H'lo," he said wearily.

"This," said Judge severely, "is a fine time to be getting home."

"Better stay f'r breakfast," suggested Slim blandly. Judge snorted, and started to rebuke Slim more plainly, but Slim interrupted.

"I thought somebody said that Frank Travis was killed. He ain't. Hell, he came to town last night in a horse and buggy."

"In the buggy, I presume—not in the horse, Slim," said Henry. "You say—wait a minute! Did you say it was Frank Travis?"

"Tha's right. And he brought the mos' beautiful lady I ever seen with him. 'S a fact. She's the new school teacher, I unnerstand."

Henry and Judge looked at each other for several moments.

"Identification all shot to smithereens," said Judge.

"Well, I'll start breakfast," sighed Frijole. "If yuh want a snifter of that last batch, Henry—go easy until yore pipes get heated."

"Thank you—not before breakfast, Frijole," said Henry.

"I stepped in some of that mash," declared Slim, "and she done et the heel off m' boot. What kinda whiskey will that make?"

"Blended stuff," replied Frijole soberly.

"Blended with what?" asked Judge.

"Potato alcohol and turpenteen," replied Frijole, "and with jest a slight tech of red paint to give color. She's shore smooth, gents."

"I'll take a jug back with us," said Henry. "It should be well aged by two o'clock this afternoon."

"She'll be a patriarch by noon," declared Frijole, and hurried to the kitchen.

Life was like that on the JHC; no one took it seriously. Slim Pickins, with the assistance of Thunder and Lightning Mendoza, handled the cattle, kept the water-holes open, and repaired the fences. Henry was not critical. Judge Van Treece's lectures on efficiency fell on deaf ears. He advocated the discharge of the two Mexicans, but Henry vetoed such an idea. Henry loved to laugh, and what was funnier than those two mishandling the King's English?

What if Frijole Bill neglected his work to manufacture prune whiskey, while Slim Pickins slept in the shade, while there was branding to be done? It was all right with Henry. Somehow the cooking would be done, the cattle branded.

THEY ate breakfast, and Slim took them back to Tonto City. Henry always sighed as he looked over Tonto City. When he had come there it was a sleepy cow town, with no worries for anyone. But gold had changed all that. Ore wagons, drawn by six span of mules, churned up the dust of the street, the hitch-racks were crowded, the sidewalks crowded with people. Music blared from the King's Castle, the biggest saloon and gambling place in the country, now owned by Bart Silvaine, a huge, gross-faced, overdressed gambler. Henry did not like Bart Silvaine, because the gambler was too suave, too overbearingly affable at times.

They arrived at the office and sent Slim back to the ranch, after taking a gallon jug of Frijole's latest concoction into the rear of the office, where Judge covered it with a tarpaulin. He came back to find Henry talking with a stranger.

"Judge," said Henry, "I want you to meet Frank Travis, new owner of the Shoshone Chief mine."

They shook hands, and Travis said, "I believe my demise was rumored in Scorpion Bend yesterday."

"Slightly premature, I imagine," said Henry gravely. "I am glad to know it was an error, and what may we do for you, Mr. Travis?"

"It is rather personal," said Travis soberly. "I came here last night with a Miss Terry, who is seeking the position as school teacher in your school. A very lovely young lady and of great talent, I presume. The cold, hard fact of the situation is that she needs the job. It now develops that the situation is sought by a number of applicants, who have been asked to apply this morning, regardless of how far they may have been obliged to travel; so that the trustees may make their selection."

"Is there anything wrong with the method involved?" asked Judge.

"Only," said Travis, "that Miss Terry was led to suppose that she would get the position if she arrived in time. She didn't know it was a contest."

"I see," nodded Henry solemnly. "And what am I supposed to do, Mr. Travis? I can not very well arrest the other contestants, nor threaten the trustees."

"You have influence," said Travis. "Or I don't know just what to say—but she needs the position very badly."

"You—uh—haven't heard any comments on the lady by a trustee, have you?"

"One man," replied Travis, "whom I am told is a trustee, remarked that she was, in his words, too damn purty to teach school."

Henry smiled. "I shall see what I can do, Mr. Travis. After all, Tonto City has no laws against beauty. God knows, it is drab and sordid enough."

"If she gets the position, I will make it worth your while, Sheriff."

Henry looked at him searchingly. "You will do what?"

"I'm sorry," said Travis quickly.

"Young man," said Henry quietly, "this is Arizona—and even with your millions you can't buy things like that."

"Thank you—I had that coming. I'll appreciate what you may do."

"That is all we want—appreciation—it is mighty scarce."

Frank Travis left the office. Judge rubbed his long nose and looked at Henry.

"You read that in a book, Henry," he said.

Henry chuckled. "I had that line in a play years ago, Judge. "If I do say it myself, I delivered it well after all these years. You can alter it to fit any state. The Conroys, sir, have never lost their honor."

"It must have been tied on," said Judge.

"Tightly, sir—tightly. Well, I suppose I must add my influence to the pleas of a beautiful young lady. Where is my—ah, there it is!"

"Overalls, boots—and a cane," said Judge. "But why the cane? You are not crippled—physically."

"I ignore the slur on my mentality, Judge—and I may need something a bit more potent than my influence."

AFTER Henry had gone, Oscar Johnson came in. The office seemed very small, after Oscar came in.

"Hello, Yudge," he said. "You know law pretty good, eh?"

"I have a very comprehensive knowledge of law, Oscar."

"Va'al, Yudge, is de penalty yust de same if you kill a vite man or a Svede?"

Judge looked narrowly at Oscar, but the big Swede was in earnest.

"The only difference," replied Judge, "is that for killing a white man they will hang you on Friday. For killing a Swede, they hang you on Thursday."

"A day ahead or a veek later, Yudge?" queried Oscar.

"With my permission," replied Judge, "you may go to hell!"

"Are you yoking, Yudge?"

"I am not. You have my permission and blessings. I hope you are not thinking of killing anyone."

"Yust von," said Oscar. "Chris Sonderson."

"Oh, the new cook at the Tonto Hotel."

"Ya-ah! Das fuud wrastler. He vants Yosephine."

Josephine Swensen, maid of all work at the Tonto Hotel, was Oscar's light-o'-love. Josephine was six feet tall, as angular as a rail fence, hard of jaw and harder of fist. Josephine's I. Q. was equal to Oscar's, but, if anything, she had a more potent right-hand punch.

"After the trials and tribulations you have suffered at the hands of Josephine," said Judge, "you should thank and congratulate Chris."

"Ay don't like the cut of his yib," declared Oscar. "Yudge, ay heard somet'ink about a man being borned to death in Scorpion Bend."

"You did, eh? And what did you hear, if I may ask?"

"Ay heard he vars dead."

Judge snatched his old hat off the desk and yanked it on his head.

"It is such as you that drive sane men to drink," he declared. "Stay right here and debate your own problems—I must have alcohol. If Henry Harrison Conroy insists on having a bunch of imbeciles—" Judge's voice faded in the distance, as he hurried toward the King's Castle.

Judge found Bart Silvaine at the bar, talking with a man he had never seen before.

"Judge, I want you to meet my old friend, Doc Darnell," said Silvaine. "Doc is a mining expert, coming here to plan an expansion of the Shoshone Chief mine."

"I am certainly honored, sir," boomed Doc. "Superior or Supreme?"

"Retired, sir," replied Judge, not to be outdone, as he sized up Doc Darnell. "Just now I am assisting the law enforcement of this county. It has been nice meeting you, Mr. Darnell."

"Thank you, Judge," said Doc soberly. "But in a lovely community like this, you surely do not mean that there is anything for the law to do."

Judge drew himself up to full height and looked keenly at Darnell from under beetling brows.

"Either you are a damn fool, sir, or you mistake me for one," he said coldly and walked on.

Doc Darnell looked after him, a quizzical expression in his eyes. Finally he turned to Bart Silvaine and said: "Just a little crazy, eh?"

"Right now," replied Bart Silvaine quietly, "is the proper time to get that idea out of your mind, Doc. Wait until you see the sheriff. They look like the damnedest pair of goofs on earth—but go easy. They've cleaned up some tough cases in this country, and they've got their signatures on Boot Hill."

Doc Darnell laughed quietly. "Bart, you are still barking at shadows. Inside of one week I could sell either of them the Mississippi River."

"That's true," agreed the gambler, "but after you've made a getaway, you'll find that the check they gave you is no good."

"Hm-m-m-m. That smart, eh?"

They walked to the doorway, and saw Henry and Judge meet across the street. Henry was still swinging that gold-headed cane. Judge looked him over critically. Henry seemed in good spirits.

"Well, sir," he said, "the young lady secured the position."

"She did, eh?" queried Judge. "Coercion, I suppose."

"Not at all, Judge. It was ridiculously simple. I am very pleased over everything."

"Just what," asked Judge, "did you threaten to do to the trustees?"

"I never even spoke to them, sir. In fact, I spoke to no one."

"Then how in the devil did you get her the job?"

"I didn't, sir; she already had it. Suppose we drop back to the office, lift the tarpaulin and find out just what Frijole has done for the past week to earn his salary."

"You spoke my mind, Henry. I went over to the King's Castle to get a drink, but a man at the bar irritated me so badly that I came away. Did you ever know a man named Doc Darnell—a friend of Bart Silvaine?"

"The name is not familiar, Judge. But if he is a friend of Bart Silvaine, I'm sure our paths have never crossed."

They entered the empty office and went to the rear, where Henry produced two tin cups, which Judge filled from the jug.

"This man," said Judge, "is a mining expert, brought here to plan some work on the Shoshone Chief. He is said to be a mining expert, but Henry"—Judge lowered his voice—"if he isn't a crook, may I never claim to know anything about human character."

"Snap judgment, perhaps," suggested Henry.

"Intuition," corrected Judge. "He has a honeyed voice, a diamond stickpin, and a pair of hands that never felt the rasp of a pick-handle. Well, here is confusion to crime, my friend."

Henry and Judge drank half the cupful, stopped and stared at each other, both unable to breathe or speak for the moment.

Judge Adam's-apple jerked convulsively and he closed his eyes. Then they both finished the drink. Henry leaned against the bars of a cell and heaved a deep sigh, his eyes closed.

"Steel shavings, ground glass and nitric," whispered Judge.

"The first swallow," wheezed Henry,

"was terrific. After that I heard two distinct splashes, as my tonsils fell."

"And Bill Shakespeare ate the mash!" marveled Judge. "Well, I'd hate to think that a rooster had a better constitution than I. Shall we fill them up again, Henry."

"Pray do," replied Henry soberly. "It will be a noble experiment."

DOC DARNELL paced up and down the living-room of Jim Wade's cottage at the Shoshone Chief mine, while Jim Wade, a big, hard-faced man, sat in an old rocker, his feet on a table, as he smoked his pipe.

"Set down, Doc," he said irritably. "Stop wearin' out the floor."

Doc came back to the table and started to say something, but stopped when he heard the sound of wheels on the rocky ground outside. Someone knocked on the door, and Wade told them gruffly to come in. It was Frank Travis.

"You sure took your time," growled Doc Darnell.

Travis flung his hat on the table and sat down.

"What the hell happened to you in Scorpion Bend?" he asked. "You sure disappeared quick."

"Never mind that part of it," replied Doc. "Meet Jim Wade, manager of *your* mine."

Neither of them offered to shake hands.

"What was your idea in chasing around with that girl, Frank?"

"She's a good driver, Doc," grinned Travis. "We both wanted to get to Tonto City; so I hired the horse and buggy, and she did the driving."

"I told you to keep away from folks as much as possible. Damn it, can't you understand that we are playing a damn dangerous game. One mistake, and we're stuck. When you're playing the part of a millionaire—act like one."

Travis lighted a cigarette and flung the match into the fireplace.

"I've been thinking this thing over, Doc," he said. "There's a lot of bad angles in the deal. Suppose Frank Travis shows up. Suppose someone from his organization comes. Oh, I know the deal. I've practiced signing Frank Travis' signature until I can do it in the dark. I sell you the mine for a big price. You are backed by eastern capital. You pay me twenty-five thousand—and I drift. But what happens to you when Frank Travis shows up?"

"You won't be here," replied Doc, "so why worry? We'll handle it ourselves."

Travis turned to Wade. "I suppose you'll tell him you were fooled by my likeness to him, eh?"

Wade laughed shortly. "He's never been here. I was hired by his father."

"Well, that's settled," said Doc. "When the transfer is made, I fire Wade. He takes his cut and pulls out. Later, after we're sure that everything is safe, Wade can come back. I'm the nominal owner of the mine, and I've got brains enough to outsmart anything that comes up."

"When do we pull this job?" asked Travis.

"After pay day," said Doc. "We'll let Travis' outfit square up everything, and we start a clean slate."

"And I get twenty-five thousand, eh?" mused Travis. "The mine is worth half a million. Pretty small percentage to the leading role, Doc."

Doc and Wade exchanged quick glances.

"Twenty-five thousand is more than you could make in a lifetime," said Doc.

"I admit it," said Travis, "but that doesn't change the fact that I'm the key in this situation. Without me—you may as well go back home."

"How much do yuh want?" asked Wade bluntly.

"Enough to make it worth my while," replied Travis quietly. "Settle it between you—and let me know the figure."

"All right, all right," said Doc hastily. "You won't lose. Move up here from the

hotel tomorrow, where we know you'll be safe—and handy. We can't take any chances on you making a fool remark to somebody that might queer the whole deal. And keep away from that girl."

"What's that girl to you?" asked Travis curiously. "Suppose she does recognize you?"

Doc Darnell stared at the floor for several moments. Finally he said, "I recognized that girl—after twelve years. I haven't changed much, and she'd recognize me very easily."

"Why not get rid of—" began Wade, but Doc silenced him.

"What did you mean by that, Wade?" asked Travis.

Wade spat toward the fireplace, but did not answer.

"I can stay away from her," said Doc. "She doesn't know I'm here. In fact, I'm not sure she got a good look at me in Scorpion Bend. And you keep away from her, too, Frank. We're playing for the biggest stake of our lives, and I'm not letting anything interfere with things. At my age, I can't afford to make a failure out of this deal—and I won't."

Travis got up and walked the length of the room, finally stopping in front of Doc Darnell.

"Speaking about that girl," he said quietly. "Nothing is to happen to her. The day this deal is to be settled she is to be working in Tonto City and perfectly safe—or it won't be settled, Doc. And if she is molested after the deal is settled—"

"She won't be," said Doc quickly. "I'm not fighting women. You have my word."

"After what I know about you, Doc," said Travis evenly, "I should go a lot on your word. Don't get red in the face. We're all crooks; so we may as well speak our minds."

"The kid's right," said Jim Wade. "We're in this together. If he wants to protect that girl—I don't blame him."

"She'll be protected," promised Doc quickly. "No use getting riled over her."

"And I'm not moving out here," added Travis. "I'll come up every day, but I'll live at the hotel—if that's what they call it. And if I want to see that girl—that's my business, Doc."

"All right, all right! Go ahead. Far be it from me to guide you."

"The kid has his rights," said Jim Wade. "I'd do the same."

"That's right—we all would," said Doc.

IV

THE inquest at Scorpion Bend, for lack of witnesses, was merely a formality. The local doctor testified that the man's skull had been smashed by a blunt instrument before being nearly incinerated, so the jury brought in a verdict of murder, committed by a party or parties unknown. As there was no means of identification, the body was buried by the county.

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly's story of the inquest was filled with barbed criticisms of Henry Harrison Conroy and his staff. It said, in part:

"Had the sheriff and deputy been even partly sober when they met the killers at the forks of the road, as they testified, they might have identified the men. But this is only a phase of the unpopular regime of the Shame of Arizona."

Judge exploded in righteous wrath.

"We were not drunk!" he declared huskily. "You know we were not, Henry."

"I do not suppose we had to exceed twelve drinks apiece, Judge," replied Henry solemnly. "The man exaggerates."

"Ay got drunk vonce," said Oscar Johnson soberly.

"You did, Oscar?" queried Henry. "What happened?"

"That was two years ago," said Judge, "and he never sobered up."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. Nola Terry was standing in the doorway of the office.

"I presume you are Mr. Conroy," she was saying.

Henry disengaged his feet from the desk and managed to get to his feet.

"Yes, indeed," he replied. "You are Miss Terry, I believe."

"Yes. I wanted to thank you for helping me get the position as teacher in the Tonto school."

"My dear," smiled Henry, "I did nothing."

"You are modest. Mr. Travis told me."

"My regards to Mr. Travis. Won't you sit down, Miss Terry?"

"Thank you, I will, because I wish to speak to you on a little matter. I haven't the slightest idea what it is all about, and I—I would like a little advice."

Nola took a letter from her purse, extracted the one sheet of paper and seven twenty-dollar bills, which she placed on the desk.

Henry picked up the letter and read it aloud:

Dear Miss Terry: If you are wise you will leave Tonto City at once. You are in great danger, which I can't explain. I am enclosing a hundred and forty dollars for your expenses. Say nothing to anybody, but go quickly.

A Friend.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "A friend! And hard cash, too. Miss Terry, this is rather remarkable."

"I thought so," she replied quietly.

"A joke, perhaps," suggested Judge.

"At a hundred and forty dollars, Judge?" asked Henry. "That is good old coin of the realm. Hm-m-m-m-m. A friend. Miss Terry, have you made any friends since arriving here?"

"I haven't been here long enough to know anyone," she replied. "That is the queer part of it."

"Are you afraid?" asked Henry.

"I—I really do not feel any too secure, Mr. Conroy."

"No, of course not. Well, well! Someone does not want you here; someone who is willing to pay you money to get out. Just who could that be?"

"I wish I knew. I am boarding and rooming at the Gibson home, but I have been there such a short time that I haven't really become acquainted with the Gibson family. This letter is a mystery, Mr. Conroy."

"Ah, yes, indeed—a mystery," agreed Henry. "But that is what we are here for, my dear; to unravel mysteries. I'm sure we will get at the bottom of it in a short time."

"Do you wish to keep the letter, Mr. Conroy?" she asked.

"Ah, yes. You keep the money. Spend it, if you wish."

"But it isn't my money."

"Well, suppose you keep it until the rightful owner comes and asks for it, Miss Terry."

"Thank you, Mr. Conroy. I will run along now."

"Good day, my dear," smiled Henry. "Do not worry—all will be well."

After she had gone, Judge snorted aloud.

"Of all the unmitigated asses I have ever known—you carry the flag, Henry," he declared. "We are here to unravel mysteries, are we? Sherlock Holmes Conroy! Sir, you would promise the moon to a pretty woman."

"She vars owful purty," remarked Oscar.

"Hm-m-m-m!" snorted Judge. "Beauty in distress. Ah, yes, all will be well, my dear! Honeyed words—and nothing behind them, except a vacuum."

"Hast finished?" queried Henry soberly.

"Hast," replied Judge grimly.

"Oscar, get the jug," ordered Henry. "Bring three tin cups, too."

The huge figure of Doc Darnell loomed up in the doorway.

"Make it four, Oscar," said Henry. "Good day, sir."

"And to you, Sheriff," boomed Doc genially. "I am Darnell, gentlemen. I

am, at present, making an expert survey of the Shoshone Chief for Mr. Travis, the owner. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Treece. Pardon me for not recognizing you at once. And—er—what have we here?"

Oscar came in with the jug and the cups. Henry smiled, as he lined up the four cups on the desk-top.

"In England," he replied, "it is tea; in Tonto City it is prune liquor. You indulge, I hope, sir?"

"I have never tasted prune liquor," said Doc, "but I am agreeable."

Henry poured the liquor to the top of the cups. Doc sniffed at the aromatic liquor, a rather unusual odor.

"To you, Mr. Darnell," Henry said. "Bottoms up, gentlemen."

DOC DARNELL emptied his cup, his right arm dropped limply to his side, while he braced his left solidly against the desk. His breathing was little more than convulsive shudders, which finally passed, leaving him fairly normal, but with a florid complexion and a husky throat.

"That," he declared in a wheezy voice, "tops anything I have ever sent down my throat. Of what is it made, if I may ask?"

"It is based on the plebian prune," replied Henry, "blended with potato alcohol and turpentine, with a minimum of horse liniment. What else is in it, only Frijole Bill knows. Have another, sir?"

"My God!" exclaimed Doc Darnell, aghast at the thought. "Does one take more than one drink during the same decade?"

"The first one," smiled Henry, "is the initiation. After that, you will not mind. In fact, after the second one, you will scoff at any other liquor."

"After two of those," replied Doc, "I could scoff at mayhem. Well, if it is the custom—"

Doc drank another, but this time, except for a gasp or two, he was all right. He shrugged, placed the cup on the desk and smiled widely.

"Egad, it hath a glow!" he exclaimed quietly.

"Sit down, sir," invited Henry. "It is the safe thing to do."

Doc sat down and expanded. "I like it here," he declared. "In fact, if nothing happens, I shall be here indefinitely."

"After two drinks of that," said Judge dryly, "the future of all of us is in grave doubt."

"No, no, I did not mean the liquor," laughed Doc. "As a matter of fact, I represent Eastern capital. If my report justifies the investment, they will purchase the Shoshone Chief mine, with me in charge. Mr. Travis and I are negotiating at present. By Jove, that stuff sure has some authority!"

"We shall be pleased to add you to our citizenship," said Henry. "Tonto City needs big men; men of your caliber, Mr. Darnell. We must expand."

"This town," said Doc expansively, "needs someone to give it a shove."

"True," agreed Judge quickly, "and then someone to pick up the pieces."

"You jest, my friend," chuckled Doc.

"I never jest," declared Judge soberly. "Remember, I have lived in this town a long time. It will not stand a hearty shove."

"How about another yigger of yuice?" suggested Oscar, motioning toward the empty cups.

"A noble thought," said Henry. "Fill them up, Oscar."

Doc got to his feet, but not without difficulty.

"If you will excuse me," he said huskily, "I will be going. I just remembered an important letter I must write. Next time—perhaps. Good afternoon, gentlemen; it has been good to see you again."

Doc hit his right shoulder against the side of the door, but managed to right himself and went up the street.

"Good to see us again," chuckled Henry. "Our friend Doc Darnell is as pie-eyed as possible. He felt himself slipping. Well,

here's to his kneecaps—may they bear him well."

"That man," declared Judge, "is as crooked as a snake-track in a mesquite patch, Henry."

"Snap judgment, my friend. Perhaps an honest soul, with an exaggerated ego. You are too prone to smell out the criminal odor, Judge. He must be honest, or he would not be representing Eastern capital."

THE ranch buckboard drew up in front of the office. Slim Pickins was driving, with Frijole on the seat beside him, while Thunder and Lightning rode in the back, with their feet hanging over the tailgate. All four were dusty and dirty, as they climbed out and entered the office.

Slim tossed a small canvas sack on the table.

"Never gimme a job like that again," he said. "My Gawd, Henry, you ain't got no idea how many ashes there was to sift. And that's all we found."

Frijole grabbed the jug and a cup, spilling the liquor in his haste.

"Pour one for each," ordered Henry. "You look dry."

"What are they talking about, Henry?" asked Judge.

"I had them sift the ashes in that burned shack," replied Henry, and then dumped out some metal objects from the canvas sack. There were two large buckles, evidently from a suitcase, because the metal corners were also there, but Henry was more interested in three metal initials, which he spread out on the desk; initials about an inch high. As he laid them out in a line they were F H T. Judge looked them over critically.

"Who would be F. H. T.?" he queried. Henry swept them off the desk-top and put them in a drawer of his desk.

"That was shore a thirsty job," declared Slim.

"This *is* liquor!" said Frijole, wiping away the tears. "It shore takes the ashes out of yore gullet. How do yuh like it, Oscar?"

"Ay," exclaimed Oscar, "vant to sing!"

"No singing," said Judge. "Fill them up again; so the boys can go home and clean up."

"Jist a couple more," said Frijole. "I've shore got a thirst."

"Don' speel heem!" warned Lightning. "Those theeng burn hole een the overall."

Their drinks finished, the four men climbed into the buckboard and headed for the JHC. Oscar sprawled on the office cot, at peace with the world. Judge tilted his chair-back against the wall, hooked his heels over the lone rung, and looked quizzically at Henry, who sat there, eyes half-closed.

"Those initials are F. H. T.," mused Henry. "The *Clarion*, and may it strangle in its own vitriol, said that Frank Travis was to arrive that night. Queer, Judge—very queer."

"Something," quoted Judge hollowly, "is rotten in the state of Denmark."

"And likewise in the State of Arizona," added Henry.

V

THE schoolhouse at Tonto City was not a thing of any great beauty. It was a box-like, pine board structure, sans paint, and without a bit of grass or foliage around it. The shingles had curled from the heat, giving the roof sort of a moulty appearance. The front steps were in the sun, and on these front steps sat Frank Travis.

School had been dismissed at least thirty minutes, and Frank was waiting for Nola Terry to come out. She finally emerged, carefully locking the door, but paying no attention to Frank, who was uncomfortably warm.

She turned from the door, brushed a damp lock of hair away from her eyes and looked at him.

"I told you that you must not come up

here to meet me," she said severely. "People are already talking about us."

"Isn't that good?" he asked innocently.

"Of course, it isn't good. The trustees won't like it."

"Jealous?" he queried. "They are all married, I understand."

"Of course, they are not jealous. But even the children notice it. One of the little boys came up to me before school was dismissed and said:

" 'Teacher—he's settin' on the steps'."

"I know," replied Frank quietly. "I bribed him to do it."

"You bribed him? Why, for goodness sake!"

"Mostly for my sake," said Frank Travis meekly. "Shall we walk back to town?"

"I suppose so. But I do hope that none of the trustees see us."

"They wouldn't fire you for walking with me, would they, Nola?"

"They might. Maybe they would object to the teacher walking home with a man. They will not hire a married woman, and when you take this job you must agree to not get married, as long as you teach the school."

"Well, that's all right," grinned Frank. "After we get married, you won't need to teach school."

"After we—don't be ridiculous, Frank Travis."

"I'm serious, Nola. I told you the night we came here from Scorpion Bend that you were the most wonderful girl I ever met."

"I know," she smiled. "You expected to see hard-faced women and Indian squaws."

"And I saw you," he added quietly. "Let's be sensible, Nola."

"Let's," she agreed quickly.

"If that was meant to discourage me—I never heard it," said Frank. "I'm a very persistent person."

"I am beginning to find that out. I don't want to marry you. Why, I don't know anything about you—nor you about me."

"Think of the things we'll find out about each other, after we are married. Like opening an old chest, after a treasure hunt."

"There might be skeletons," she suggested quietly.

"I love 'em," he said soberly. "They rattle so pretty."

"You don't discourage very easily," she said.

"Discourage? My dear!"

"Frank, let's really be sensible. I am here to teach school. What you are doing here, I do not know. All I know is your name."

"Names don't mean much down here, Nola. In many cases, I believe a brand mark is more honest than a name—and even a rustler can change that. If my name wasn't Frank Travis, what difference would that make?"

"Isn't your name Frank Travis?" she asked quickly.

"Why did you ask me that, Nola?"

"I don't know."

They had reached the wooden sidewalk and were walking down the main street, approaching the Tonto Hotel.

"You must leave me at the general store," said Nola. "I have some shopping to do."

"All right, Nola. I'm sorry if my meeting you has been annoying. I'll be more careful in the future; but I must see you. I mean it. If you—"

They had reached the entrance to the hotel, when Doc Darnell came out. He had likely imbibed more than the prune whiskey he got at the sheriff's office, and was not in a very joyful mood. His lurch from the doorway nearly caused him to collide with Nola, who drew aside quickly, staring at him.

"Pull yourself up, Doc!" exclaimed Frank quietly.

"Who, me?" queried Doc. "Why, I—I—hm-m-m-m!"

He saw Nola, and his lips tightened, as he swallowed painfully. If wishes were horses, Doc Darnell would have been riding far from that spot.

"James Wilton!" exclaimed Nola. Frank Travis watched Doc Darnell.

"Wilton?" queried Doc. "You called me Wilton, young lady?"

Doc was sparring, gathering his unlimited nerve.

"You are James Wilton," she said accusingly. "I'd remember *you.*"

"I am sorry," said Doc. His nerves were working again. "Evidently you mistake me for another. But no harm done. My name is Darnell, and I have never known a James Wilton. My loss, I suppose."

He turned his head and looked at Frank, who was smiling slightly. It nettled Doc. He wondered if this young fool had told her something. It might ruin their whole deal. He said to Frank:

"Go up to your room, and I will meet you within the hour. Important." Then, bowing to Nola, "No harm done, my dear lady. You are excused for mistaking me; it has been done before."

Then he stepped off the sidewalk and walked across the street. Nola and Frank looked at each other, and her eyes were very frosty as she said, "I will leave you here. If that man is your employer—"

Then she turned and walked down the street. Frank smiled grimly, as he watched her trim figure disappear into the general store. He waited in the little lobby, until Doc came from King's Castle, and went up to his room, where Doc joined him.

The big man had imbibed more liquor, but was more worried than inebriated.

"Do you realize that that girl can kill our whole game?" he asked.

"I'm afraid that you have led a very dishonest life, Doc," remarked Frank.

"Dishonest? I've taken what I could. I've played every damn game on earth—straight or crooked. But that has nothing to do with this situation. Don't you realize that I could still be dragged back to face the charges of—well, it only amounted to about eighty thousand dollars. That is small change compared to this deal. But it would kill everything."

"They can't touch me," said Frank quietly. "I haven't done anything—yet."

"Go ahead and whitewash yourself!" snorted Doc. "What's that girl doing here, anyway?"

"She's the school teacher, Doc."

"She is, eh? Oh, yes, I knew that. Something has got to be done about *her.*"

"Hands off, Doc," said Frank warningly.

"Oh, you're backing her, eh? So that's it. A lot of good that will do you. If she exposes me, you'll go down with me. She'd probably like to know that you are masquerading as another man."

"You'd tell?" asked Frank. "You'd expose our deal to the public?"

"You're damn right. It would take me about a minute to prove that you are not Frank Travis. I can tear down just as easily as I can build up."

"Just the old dog in the manger, eh, Doc?" remarked Frank. "You would. But where does this gambler fit in on the deal?"

"Silvaine? He's with Jim Wade and me. For your own information, Silvaine has ice-water for blood, and he's the best pistol shot I ever knew."

"I see. He's the gunman of the crowd."

"Don't overlook Jim Wade in that respect. It's damn plain to me that we've got to rush this deal. That girl bothers me. Wade says that the money for the payroll is due at the bank. You'll sign a check for that amount. The minute the payroll is disbursed, we buy the mine. You give us another check for the balance in the bank, and we give you your share."

"You get together with Wade and Silvaine and decide what I get," said Frank. "I'm entitled to more than twenty-five thousand."

"We'll settle that," growled Doc. "I didn't think you'd hold us up. But you've got the chance—and I don't blame you. I might do it myself, if I was in your place."

Frank laughed. "If we traded places, you'd ask for at least half."

After Doc left the hotel, Frank wandered down to the street, where he met Henry Harrison Conroy. Henry's moon-like face was rather grim, as he said, "Mr. Travis, I would like to talk with you—at my office."

Frank said, "Why, certainly," but he was wondering what the pudgy, red-faced sheriff had in mind.

They went into the office. Judge and Oscar were out somewhere. They sat down and Henry said, "Mr. Travis, something has happened that seems to be—er—rather a coincidence. The newspaper at Scorpion Bend carried the news that you were to arrive there the evening before you did arrive. On that train was a stranger. He hired a livery rig and driver to bring him here. A short distance out of Scorpion Bend, two men stuck them up, and the driver was beaten over the head. The stranger disappeared. Do you follow me, sir?"

"Very closely," nodded Frank.

"That same evening, and a little later, a shack was burned, and in that shack was burned the stranger, whose initials were F. H. T. We recovered the metal initials from the ashes. Have you a middle name, Mr. Travis?"

Frank was staring at the floor his features tensed. Henry noticed that his hands were clenched tightly.

"That sounds like murder, Sheriff," he said quietly.

"It was murder, sir. The man's skull was crushed. I asked you if you had a middle name."

Frank shook his head. "No, I have no middle name. But those initials could have been H. F. T., or any of several combinations of letters."

"As I say," replied Henry, "it is quite a coincidence — but still remains — murder, sir."

"I quite agree with you."

"Thank you, sir; it isn't often that anyone agrees with me. By the way, a man who calls himself Doc Darnell was in to visit us. He tells me that he is trying to purchase the Shoshone Chief from you."

"Yes, I believe that is his intentions. They will buy on his recommendation, I understand."

"I see. He goes over the whole situation; in fact, he makes a comprehensive survey of the physical assets, examines veins, machinery, and the general layout, looks deeper under the surface than the average human, and—"

"Oh, certainly," interrupted Frank. "It is a tedious job."

"Then," said Henry quietly, "why in hell don't he do it? Since coming to Tonto City he has been once at the mine, and for possibly an hour. He doesn't even know the location of the shaft-house."

"Well, I don't know," confessed Frank, looking with a certain degree of admiration upon the roly-poly sheriff.

"If he is a mining engineer, I am an Indian chief," declared Henry.

Frank smiled inwardly. Henry was painting a word picture of Doc Darnell.

"And one more thing, Mr. Travis," said Henry. "Your admiration for Miss Terry, the school teacher, is evident. I do not blame you—she is a very beautiful woman. Did Miss Terry tell you about a letter she received?"

"Letter?" asked Frank curiously. "No, she did not, Sheriff."

"A letter, together with a hundred and forty dollars in currency, which warned her of danger, and asked her to leave Tonto City at once."

"Why—why, that is ridiculous," spluttered Frank. "Warning her, you say?"

Henry nodded quickly. "The money was to pay her expenses, and the letter was merely signed, a friend."

Frank got to his feet and walked to the doorway, where he turned.

"I don't understand it," he said. "If she is in danger—I'll see you later."

Frank went hurrying up the sidewalk. Henry walked to the doorway and glanced up the street. Judge came in from the rear room, walking carefully and wiping his lips with a bandanna handkerchief.

"You seem to have stirred the young gentleman," remarked Judge. "I am sure he has something to do with it."

Henry turned and looked at Judge.

"I told you, sir, to sit back there and listen—not to attack that jug of prune whiskey."

"I was very discreet, Henry," smiled Judge. "I should like to see the expression on Doc Darnell's face, when Mr. Travis tells him your advice on experting a mine. And he will, or I am badly mistaken. Would it be amiss, if we adjourned to the jug, my friend?"

"And if it were—who cares," smiled Henry. "After a bit of the essence of the festive prune, Judge, we are going to Scorpion Bend."

"Why?" asked Judge flatly.

Henry waved the question aside. "Have you ever looked at the moon from the top of Lobo Grades, Judge?" he asked.

"With envy, sir," declared Judge.

"Envy? And why with envy, if I may ask?"

"The moon, sir," replied Judge, "is safe. It doesn't have to ride over dangerous roads with a nit-wit at the lines. Shall I pour, sir?"

"Pray do," nodded Henry soberly.

JAMES WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW PELLY had finished mailing his latest edition of the *Clarion,* and felt well satisfied with his handiwork. He elevated his slipper-shod feet to the top of his littered desk, spread the paper across his knees, and smacked his lips over his leading editorial, with its banner line—MURDER IGNORED AGAIN!

Pelly thought it was well written. It pointed out the inefficiency of Henry Harrison Conroy and his staff of incompetents, and demanded action on the latest murder. It was full of vitriol, and demanded that the commissioners immediately replace the Shame of Arizona with efficient, intelligent men.

Yes, Mr. Pelly thought it was very, very good. Yet, strangely enough, Mr. Pelly had advocated it before—and Henry Harrison Conroy was still in office.

Mr. Pelly did not notice that the front door of the office had been left open. In fact, Mr. Pelly did not know that anyone was inside the door, until he heard a gentle cough, and Judge's voice saying:

"I distinctly heard him smack his lips, indicating that he really *eats* his own words, Henry."

James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly let the paper slide to the floor, as he twisted in his chair to see Henry and Judge at the counter.

"Well!" he exclaimed. "I didn't see you come in."

"You must have expected us," said Henry. "After that editorial—"

"The *Clarion* hews to the line," said Pelly firmly.

"And smells to High Heaven," added Judge.

Henry shook his head sadly at Pelly. "You fail to be original," he said. "After one good editorial, your supply of vitriolic vocabulary is exhausted. Since then you repeat, my dear boy, until your writings are odious and odorous. You should study more and fret less."

Pelly's face flamed. "What do you want?" he asked angrily.

"If you still have that letter-head from the Frank Travis organization," replied Henry, "I would like to note their address."

Pelly had it, and slid it across the counter to Henry.

"Have you seen Oscar Johnson today?" asked Judge.

"No," replied Pelly, "and I hope I never see him again."

"That isn't mutual," said Judge. "He said he wanted to see you. You see, he wants you to explain what a drunken, misfit Swede means. I explained, as best I might, but he wants your version. Getting technical, I suppose."

"If he comes here," declared Pelly nervously, "I—I will not be responsible for what happens to him."

"Isn't that strange?" queried Judge. "He said the same thing about you."

Henry shoved the letter back to Pelly. "Thank you very much," he said.

But Pelly wasn't interested in the letter. "I'll have him arrested," he said. "I'll have him put under bonds to keep the peace."

"Just because he wants to ask you a question?" queried Henry.

"And such a simple question," added Judge. "Or is it possible that you, in all your wisdom, cannot answer it, Mr. Pelly?"

"He—he is all muscle and no brains," wailed Pelly.

"The pen, my dear boy, is supposed to be mightier than the sword," said Henry. "Look him in the eye and read him soothing parables. Explain to him that 'drunken, misfit Swede' is a term of endearment. He will understand, I am sure."

"Be gentle but firm," admonished Judge. "If he is stubborn, show him that you are his master. Good day, sir."

They walked out, sober-faced, and went up the street. It was still early in the forenoon. Henry went to the depot, where he sent the following wire to Frank Travis' San Francisco address:

PLEASE WIRE ME PRESENT ADDRESS OF FRANK TRAVIS AND WHAT ARE HIS THREE INITIALS.

"Do you suppose Oscar will go down to the *Clarion* office?" asked Judge.

"Not likely," smiled Henry. "And still, I wish he would. No, no, I do not mean that I wish the annihilation of Mr. Pelly, but—it rather rankles to have him print that the county should abolish the sheriff's office, because nothing ever comes from there, except ribald mirth and odors of distillation."

"At times," said Judge quietly, "one may smell that prune whiskey even out on the street."

"I know that Judge," agreed Henry, "but *ribald mirth!* That is a gross misstatement. We may laugh, sir—but not in a ribald way."

"Not at all," agreed Judge. "I suppose we must stay here, until you get an answer to that telegram."

"Exactly; so we may as well enjoy the flesh-pots of Scorpion Bend."

Instead of hiring a rig from the livery-stable, they came to Scorpion Bend in a two-seated spring-wagon, with Slim driving, and Oscar Johnson occupying the extra seat. Neither of them were expert drivers, but both were better than Henry or Judge.

They were both at the Ocotillo Saloon, when Henry and Judge came back from the depot.

"Ay am feeling like a vipporvill," declared Oscar. "Das is goot liquor."

"You better ease off a little, Oscar," advised Judge. "If James Wadsworth Longfellow Pelly sees you, feeling like a whippoorwill—"

"Oh, ya-a-ah! Das newspaper faller. Ay don't like de cut of his yib."

"Never mind the cut of his jib," said Henry. "Keep away from him—and stay sober—both of you."

"Me, I'm perfec'ly shober," declared Slim. "I could drive a jerk-line team, hauling six wagons, over a pack-trail."

"And no doubt you would," agreed Henry. "But I want you able to drive two horses and wagon over a road; so take it easy."

At six o'clock that afternoon Henry received an answer to his telegram. It

was from James Worth, who added, office secretary. It read:

AS FAR AS WE KNOW FRANK TRAVIS IS IN TONTO CITY.

"That," said Henry, "is a big help to our side. No information about his initials."

"As far as they know," said Judge. "What do you think, Henry?"

"If Frank Travis' middle initial is H," said Henry, "then Frank Travis was burned in that shack, and this deal to sell the Shoshone Chief is the biggest steal ever pulled off in Wild Horse Valley. The Frank Travis we know is an impostor, Judge."

"I told you that Doc Darnell is a crook," declared Judge. "He is behind the deal. A forged signature — and a bunch of crooks make half a million."

"I believe," said Henry quietly, "that something is about to happen."

"And," said Judge, "I hope it will not be to us."

VI

BECAUSE of the intense heat of the daytime, the stage to Scorpion Bend left Tonto City at eight o'clock in the evening. Dave Leeds, the regular driver, had been drinking with Tony Vega, who was a substitute driver, and worked between times as a swamper at the King's Castle Saloon, and was in no condition to handle the team. Tony was a careful drinker, and was able to take over the job.

Just before the stage was ready to leave Tonto City, a woman got in. Perhaps Tony Vega was the only one in town who saw her get aboard. At any rate, the stage left Tonto City in a cloud of dust, and headed for the long trip over the Lobo Grades.

About nine o'clock Frank Travis walked into the Tonto Hotel, and the old clerk handed him an envelope, with the remark that he found it on the counter. Travis' name was on the envelope.

He opened the envelope and scanned the few lines. It was from Nola Terry, and read:

It is necessary for me to leave here at once. Do not look for me.

It was simply signed "Nola." Frank Travis' jaw tightened, as he turned back to the doorway. He knew that the stage had been gone an hour, and that the stage depot was closed. He walked swiftly down to the Gibson home, where Nola had lived, and found them upset, too. A little Mexican boy had delivered a note to Mrs. Gibson from Nola. It read:

Will you please explain to the trustees that I must go at once. Have them pay you my salary to date for my board and room. Sorry, but this is very urgent —and thank you for your kindness to me.

"She was so happy here," said Mrs. Gibson. "Never a word about leaving. Such a lovely girl, Mr. Travis."

"Yes," said Frank quietly, and went back to the main street.

There was still one possibility left. If he could get to Scorpion Bend before she could catch a train. He found Tommy Roper, the stuttering cowboy, who managed the livery-stable, and explained what he wanted.

"Wh-wh-why dud-dud-don't you rur-ride a huh-horse?" asked Tommy. "It's quh-quh-quicker."

"I can't ride," said Travis impatiently. "You hitch up a horse—and you do the driving. Don't argue—I want speed."

AFTER supper that evening Henry and Judge found Slim Pickins, trying to raffle off a stray dog in the Gilt Edge Saloon. He had sold Oscar Johnson four tickets at twenty-five cents apiece, and the

big Swede was arguing for an immediate drawing, when Henry and Judge appeared. Slim reluctantly released the dog, and spent the dollar for drinks.

"I believe," remarked Henry, "that I shall drive the team."

"I was afraid of that," sighed Judge.

"Ay vill drive," announced Oscar. "Ay could drive a team in de dark over Lobo Grades, vit von hand tied behind me."

"And not even hang onto the lines," added Slim. "I've seen yuh do it."

However, Slim and Oscar sat in the back seat, while Henry did the driving, with the apprehensive Judge beside him. Henry was not a good driver. On sharp turns Henry was not interested in the fate of the rear wheels. The Lobo Grades were dangerous. In most places the road was not wide enough for two vehicles to pass, and the southbound vehicle must take the outside edge all the way across the grades. One mistake would plunge the vehicle into the bottom of Lobo Canyon, which in certain places was close to four hundred feet deep. The average depth along the grades would be over two hundred feet.

There was no moon that night. Slim and Oscar went to sleep, while Judge fumed and fretted, but Henry paid little attention. In the daylight, or in moonlight, it was possible to see far enough ahead from curves to observe the approach of another vehicle, thus enabling a driver to select a wide spot for the passing. But tonight there was no possible chance of that.

Judge lighted a match and looked at his watch.

"Where do you suppose we will meet the stage?" he asked anxiously.

"Who knows?" replied Henry. "But Dave Leeds is a careful driver, and he will realize the importance of careful traveling. You may rest assured, sir, that I will bring you safely home."

"Stay closer to the wall, Henry," urged Judge. "Plenty of time to tempt fate, when we meet someone."

"Timid soul," sighed Henry, but swung the team in a little closer to the inside.

There was a slight upgrade, as they approached one of the hair-pin turns. Neither Henry nor Judge saw the approaching stage, until it was nearly into them. Henry's team swerved to the left, and the light wagon took the brunt of the crash, which was terrific. It flung the lighter vehicle against the rocky wall, sparks flew from shod hoofs, a horse screamed. Then there was only dust-filled air, a few pieces of rocks rolling from the wall of the grade.

Henry found himself on his hands and knees on a horse, tangled in the harness, and so badly dazed that he hardly knew what happened. The horse never moved, but the other one was still kicking. Henry managed to get loose and stagger into the road where Oscar's voice complained:

"Who in de ha'al has been monkeying?" Slim wailed.

"All right, all right! Get yore damn feet off my neck!"

Henry said weakly, "Judge! Judge, where are you?"

"I am here," said Judge peevishly. "I fell between the seat and the dash, and that damn seat has pinned my neck so tight I can't get loose."

"I reckon it's yore feet—not Oscar's," said Slim. "My God, what a crash! What'd yuh do, Henry, hit the wall?"

Slim helped Judge loose, and they all stood in the road.

"It was the stage," declared Judge. "I saw enough to recognize it. But where in the devil—who have we here?"

It was Tony Vega, knocked silly, but still able to stagger around. Henry grabbed him by the sleeve, and kept him from walking into the canyon.

"Where's the stage?" panted Tony. "My Gawd, what did we hit?"

"You hit us," accused Judge. "You never gave us a chance."

"It—it threw me off," said Tony. "Where's the stage?"

"I'm afraid," said Henry painfully, "that the stage is down at the bottom of the canyon."

"My God!" exclaimed Tony. "There's a woman on the stage!"

"A—a woman?" panted Judge. "Who in the name of—"

"I dunno," said Tony. "She got on at Tonto. Wore a veil—paid me cash. I dunno who she is, I tell yuh. My God, she's dead!"

"I am very much afraid you are right, Tony," said Henry. "Where is Dave Leeds?"

"Had too much whiskey," said Tony. "I had to drive. And look what happened! I didn't see yuh at all. It was too dark. What can we do?"

"One of our horses got killed," informed Slim. "The other one seems to be all right. I'll yank off the harness and ride for help."

"A good idea, Slim," agreed Henry. "Bring plenty of men—and ropes. We'll need—"

"We can't get down from here," interrupted Slim. "We'll have to go in the lower end of the canyon, Henry. I'll go for help, and you fellers start walkin'. It's only about five miles to the end of the grades. So-long, I'll go as fast as that horse can travel."

But when Slim turned to get on the horse, that horse was already traveling away in the darkness.

"What the hell!" yelled Slim. "There goes that—"

"Wega took him!" snorted Oscar. "Ay saw him do it."

"Why would Tony Vega do that?" asked Henry. "Why, he—well, he has gone."

"I'll saw his damn ears off," promised Slim angrily.

They stood around in the darkness, each one rubbing some part of his injured anatomy, and wondering what to do next. Finally Henry said:

"We may as well walk. No doubt Tony Vega will sound the alarm in Tonto City; so we may as well be down at the lower end of the canyon."

No one approved nor rejected Henry's suggestion; they just started walking toward Tonto City. In about thirty minutes they met Frank Travis and Tommy Roper. They had seen a wild rider go past them, but had no idea who he was, until Henry told them what had happened. Travis got out of the buggy.

"That lady," he said huskily, "was Nola Terry."

"No!" exclaimed Henry. "The school teacher, Travis?"

"She left a note for me and one for Mrs. Gibson. She was leaving Tonto City. I—I wanted to catch her in Scorpion Bend."

They quickly unhitched the horse, and turned the buggy by hand on the narrow road.

"Do you want to go back to Tonto, Travis?" asked Henry.

"No, I—I believe I'd rather stay here. Someone else go."

"Judge, you go with Tommy," ordered Henry. "You know what is needed."

VII

IT WAS well after daylight, when the men from Tonto met Henry and his party at the mouth of Lobo Canyon. They brought extra horses, plenty of rope, and Judge was thoughtful enough to bring some food for Henry, Travis, Oscar and Slim. Lobo Canyon was full of brush and broken boulders, and the stream bed was difficult to follow. In places they had to dismount and lead their horses.

They were all more or less bruised and torn by the time they reached the approximate spot where the stage went over the edge. Frank Travis had hardly spoken a word during the hard trip, but was one of the first to see the wreckage of the stage — a smashed wheel, hanging to a manzanita snag on the side of the wall.

Henry was the first to reach the smashed vehicle, which was upside down, wedged between some boulders in the sand. He asked the men to stay back, as he went slowly up to the stage. After a close inspection, he asked them to come on. The doors had been torn off the vehicle, the top smashed almost to the floor—but there was no one inside.

The men stood around, staring at the cliffs. Henry drew a deep breath and studied the situation.

"Where is the woman?" asked one of the men quietly.

"Prob'ly flung clear of the stage," said another. "We better spread out and make a search."

For at least thirty minutes those twenty men searched. From the grade, far above them to where the stage crashed, there was not a bush nor a ledge, where the body could have been thrown. Not even a crevice was overlooked. Finally the men gathered around the stage again. Henry looked them over, and noticed that Frank Travis was not among them.

"Where is Travis?" he asked.

"Me and him went up the canyon," a man said, "but we didn't find anythin'; so I came back. Mebbe he went further on."

"See if you can find him," ordered Henry. "The rest make another search. If there was a woman in that stage, she must be here."

But that search was as futile as the first. The man came back from up the canyon and reported that he could not find Frank Travis. He said he yelled Travis' name, but there was no response.

"We will leave his horse here," said Henry.

"And prob'ly have to come back and hunt for him," growled a cowboy.

"Granted," agreed Henry. "Well, gentlemen, we may as well go back and report that there was no woman on that stage. Tony Vega must have had too many drinks."

The return trip down the canyon was as difficult as the one coming in, and the men were tired out when they reached its mouth. Henry and Judge were the last ones out, and the others were stringing along far ahead, as they emerged from the shadows of the cliffs.

"You will proceed to Tonto City," said Henry. "Contact Oscar and Slim, and the three of you keep a close eye on things. I am not at all satisfied with what we found. Watch for Tony Vega to come to Tonto. Have Slim watch the King's Castle. Tell Oscar to watch around the hotel—and you can watch from where you like. Do not miss Tony Vega, if he comes to town—and follow him when he leaves. Have your horses handy. You understand?"

"Perfectly," replied Judge stiffly. "But—about you, Henry?"

"I shall stay here."

"You think that there is someone still in that canyon?"

"I know that one man is in there, Judge."

"Oh, yes—Travis. Be careful, Henry."

"Do not be a fuss-budget! Watch for Tony Vega—and follow him."

Judge, a very slow rider, was last to reach Tonto City. He found Oscar, Slim, Frijole Bill, Thunder and Lightning at the sheriff's office. He gave Slim and Oscar their orders. Frijole said:

"We'll all watch. Hell, we'll picket this town so close that a lizard couldn't come to visit a cockroach, without us seein' him."

"And no drinking," ordered Judge. "Not a single drink."

"Aw, Judge!" protested Frijole. Judge shook his head. "I reckon I spoke up too quick," sighed Frijole. "Yuh see, I just drawed off a new batch, and brought in a gallon. She's back there behind the door, strainin' at her leash. Pore little thing."

Judge smacked his lips, but shook his head.

"No liquor," he declared.

"Ay am hortsick," declared Oscar. "Ay

could use about t'ree inches in a vash-tob."

"Today," declared Judge, "there is a drouth in Tonto City."

IT WAS a long day for Henry Harrison Conroy. All he could do was to sit in the shade of a boulder and watch the mouth of the canyon. The sun went down early at that spot, but it was not long until the shadows of evening moved in. Darkness comes swiftly after sundown in that country. Henry moved in closer to the trail. His horse was concealed in the heavy brush further back on the slope.

Coyotes yapped on the brushy ridges, and Henry saw a wild-cat come out on the trail, stretch like a satisfied house cat, and go trotting toward the mouth of the canyon. A coyote cut the trail fifty feet away from Henry, stopped short, when a vagrant breeze brought it the scent of man, and faded into the brush like a puff of smoke.

It was an hour or more after dark, when Henry heard the scrape of shod hoofs on stone, and the dark bulk of horse and rider appeared out of the canyon. About a hundred feet from where Henry sat the man drew up. For a long time he seemed to be listening. For possibly ten minutes he waited, and then two more riders came out of the canyon, traveling in close single-file.

They joined the first rider, and they talked in low tones for several moments. Finally the one rider rode swiftly away toward Tonto City, while the other two followed him at a slow trot. Henry waited several moments, before getting his own horse and coming in behind them.

About two miles north of Tonto City there was a fork in the road, where an old road led to the Shoshone Chief mine. About three miles north of Tonto City was an old trail, little used, which also led to the Shoshone Chief. Henry rode just fast enough to keep fairly close to the two riders, and when he came to this old trail, he quickly dismounted and by the aid of a match he investigated the trail. There was not a fresh track.

He mounted quickly and rode swiftly. The trail was not well defined, and in places the desert had overgrown it, but Henry depended on his range-wise horse to keep to that trail. And Henry never rode five miles faster in his life—on a horse. He was almost among the mine buildings, before he drew rein.

Henry wasn't sure where he was going, nor what he was going to do when he got there, but he had a vague idea. Avoiding the bunkhouses, and going carefully, so as not to meet anyone, he arrived at the main office building. There were no lights in the place. Henry rode around to the rear and tied his horse to a fence.

"I feel," said Henry to himself, "that I am as crazy as Jackson's mule, which swam a river to get a drink; but something inside me seems to say that I'm right. Maybe it is the lack of food and drink."

HE WENT up to the rear door of the office and turned the knob. To his surprise, the door was unlocked. Carefully he let himself into the room. He stood there long enough for his eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. To his left was a counter, reaching about two-thirds of the width of the room, which was about twenty feet by thirty feet in size. Midway of the room, and to the right, was a large desk and several chairs.

To Henry's left was a door, evidently to a closet, or storeroom. He went over to this door, but found it locked. As he started to move over to the desk his foot struck something that jingled on the rug. It was a key-ring on a broken chain, with two keys. He tried one on the door, and it opened.

But before Henry had a chance to investigate further he heard noises at the rear of the building. Someone was coming in the back doorway. There was only one thing for Henry to do and that was

to hide in the closet. As he closed the door, someone came in, and he was afraid to entirely close the door for fear they might hear him.

There was no conversation out there. The rear door closed, and he heard someone hurrying around the room, pulling down the blinds. Then a lamp was lighted. He heard a scuffling, dragging sound, and a solid thump. Then a man said:

"Damn such a job! Feelin' better, eh? You sure got a solid whack on the head, young feller. That's what yuh get for bein' nosey. And that ain't all you'll get. But yuh made it easy for us. Even that fat-nosed sheriff knows you got lost in Lobo Canyon. If they never find yuh, they'll figure you fell and killed your fool self."

Henry eased the door open a few inches. Jim Wade, manager of the mine, was standing by the desk, looking down at the bound figure of Frank Travis. Henry only got a flash of the scene, because the door creaked. Wade whirled around, started toward the door, which Henry jerked shut.

Wade jerked at the door, but it was locked—and Henry had the key. Wade rapped sharply on the panels, and said huskily:

"Open that door, you fool! You can't get away. If you don't open it before I count three, I'll fill that place full of lead!"

Wade was close to the door, in order for Henry to hear plainly; so Henry shoved the muzzle of his .45 within an inch of the panel, and pulled the trigger. The report almost deafened him, but he heard the crash as something or somebody fell down.

Quickly fitting the key in the lock Henry came out, coughing, his eyes filled with tears. If it had been a ruse, Henry fell for it; but it was no ruse. Jim Wade was sprawled on the rug, face down, his gun a few feet from his right hand, which clutched the rug. Henry took a deep breath and wiped his eyes with the back of a pudgy hand.

"Well, it was a nice night for it," he said quietly, and walked over to open the front door.

EVIDENTLY no one outside had heard the shot, muffled inside the closet. He came back and looked at Wade. Then he looked at Frank Travis, who stared at him with dazed eyes. After a few moments Henry grasped Wade's legs and proceeded to drag him behind the counter. He closed the front door, and went over to Travis, intending to untie him, but he heard the sound of horses outside, and dived back for the closet. The smoke was nearly gone now.

Someone unlocked the front door, and several men came in. They were Doc Darnell, Bart Silvaine and Tony Vega. The door clicked shut behind them, and Darnell said, "Where's Wade? Would that fool go out and leave—"

"It's all right—the door's locked," said Silvaine. "Take a look at his ropes, Tony. He's conscious, Doc. That helps a lot. You've got the papers?"

"I've got 'em. All we need is that young fool to sign 'em."

"His ropes are all right," said Tony. "Where's Wade, do yuh reckon?"

"He wouldn't run out on us, would he?" asked Doc.

"Jim Wade never ran out on anybody," said Silvaine. "If he did—where's that girl? He's the only one who knows where she is, Doc."

"I know it, Bart. It was a fool thing to do, but he insisted that one man was enough to know that. Nothing could happen to him. Hell, he brought Travis here. He was all right when Tony left them."

"Aw, he's around," said Tony. "Nothing happened to Jim Wade."

"Untie Travis, Tony," ordered Darnell. "I want these papers signed."

Tony quickly untied Travis and removed the cloth gag from his mouth.

Travis was conscious, but had been hit pretty hard.

"Yank him up here to the desk," ordered Darnell.

"My God, what's this!" exclaimed Silvaine. He dropped to one knee on the rug and held up his fingers, wet with blood. Tony shoved Travis into a chair. Silvaine and Darnell stared at each other.

"Blood!" exclaimed Doc quietly. "Whose blood? What has happened?"

"Something—sure," whispered Silvaine. "I don't like it."

"Mebbe Wade had a nose-bleed," suggested Tony. "Yeah, mebbe he did."

"Maybe he—didn't," whispered Silvaine. "Doc, I don't like this."

Doc Darnell shuffled the papers and forced a pen into Travis' fingers.

"Write that signature on this blank paper," he ordered.

Travis took the pen, but it slipped from his fingers. Darnell swore bitterly and rescued the pen from the floor.

"Wait!" exclaimed Silvaine. He saw a rug near the end of the counter had been twisted aside, when Henry dragged Wade's body.

In three strides the big gambler reached the end of the counter, with Doc close behind him.

"Wade!" gasped Silvaine. "Look, Doc!"

As Doc Darnell leaned in closer, Henry stepped from the closet. He was between them and the front door now, his big gun gripped in his right hand.

"Keep your hands in sight!" he snapped.

Silvaine and Darnell jerked upright, their hands in sight. With a slight whistle of astonishment Tony Vega started to lift his hands, and at the same moment Frank Travis reached out and took Tony's gun from his holster.

"Why, you damned—" gritted the big gambler. His right hand swung down, and the lamplight flashed on a sleeve-gun, as it dropped into his hand.

Henry's heavy Colt rattled the rafters again, and Silvaine staggered into Doc Darnell from the impact of the heavy bullet.

BUT Doc Darnell was equal to the emergency. He grasped Silvaine, whirled him around between him and Henry, using Silvaine as a shield, and with a superhuman effort he swung Silvaine off the floor and came straight at the surprised Henry, in a bull-like rush.

Henry could not shoot Darnell, and when he tried to sidestep Darnell's rush a small Navajo rug slipped under his feet, and he went down with a crash. Over him went Darnell and his burden, crashing to the floor with Darnell on top.

Darnell got to his feet with surprising speed for a man of his bulk, and fairly tore a gun from his shoulder holster. Henry was helpless for the moment, his gun-hand twisted under him.

Again the room shuddered from the concussion of a heavy shot. Darnell jerked around and the gun fell from his hand. For a moment he looked like a tight-rope walker, trying to catch his balance, and then he went down.

"I owe you that one, Doc," said Frank Travis, and at that moment Tony Vega tore the gun from Travis' hand, and in one leap skidded to the door. Before Henry could sit up and turn, Vega fired once at him, but the bullet went high, smashing into the wall.

The next instant he flung the door open, leaped outside—and landed in the arms of Oscar Johnson, who was lunging up the steps. Tony Vega yelled a strangled curse, and the next moment he was flung back into the room, flat on his back, the wind all driven from his lungs.

Behind Oscar came Judge, Slim, Frijole and the two Mexicans.

"Anyt'ing else you vant done, Henry?" asked Oscar blandly.

"Yes," replied Henry huskily, "you may go into that closet and bring out the school teacher, Oscar."

"The school teacher?" gasped Judge. "Wasn't she on that stage?"

Frank Travis, in spite of his injuries, beat Oscar to the closet. Nola Terry was quickly released. She was unhurt, except for the pains of returning circulation and shock. Travis tried to question her but she did not seem to know what had happened. Miners, attracted by the shooting, crowded into the place, but Oscar and Slim held them back.

Darnell and Wade were dead and Silvaine was badly hurt. The big gambler refused to talk, but not Tony Vega. As soon as he regained his breath, he was only too eager to talk, to answer questions.

"Silvaine and Wade killed Frank Travis and burned him in that old shack," panted Tony. "I dunno how they done it; I wasn't there. Doc got scared of the school teacher and sent her a note to git out. She didn't go, and then Silvaine figured out a scheme. He got one of the honkatonk girls to write them notes. They had to have a woman on that stage, in case anybody should see us start; so he hired another of the girls to go to Scorpion Bend, and he gave her money to buy a ticket east.

"They grabbed the school teacher and brought her out here. Wade didn't let anybody know where she was held. They wasn't goin' to hurt her, if the deal went all right. I mean, until the girl got to Scorpion Bend and got away on the train. Silvaine had to have an alibi."

"And then they were going to dispose of the school teacher," said Henry.

"Somethin' had to be done with her," admitted Tony. "That wasn't any of my business."

"Tony," said Henry, "when you grabbed that horse on the grade, you came and told Wade what happened. Then you and Wade beat us into Lobo Canyon, stole the body of that girl and took it away. Later, you knocked Travis on the head and kept him there until after dark."

"How'd you know this?" asked Tony.

"I saw the tracks in the sand beside the wrecked stage, my boy. I know somebody got there ahead of us—and that you'd have to come out."

"And Doc Darnell said you was dumb!" exclaimed Tony wearily.

Henry turned to Travis, who was rubbing Nola's wrists. The girl was crying a little. " "Travis, when you shot Doc Darnell a while ago," he said, "you remarked that you owed him that much. What did you mean? You were both in a crooked, murdering deal."

"For what he did to this girl," replied Travis quietly, "and because he murdered one of my best friends. At least, he planned it."

"Who was that friend?"

"Tommy Fuller. Oh, you don't know him. He was a private detective, who did most of my investigating. Oh, I know it don't make sense, Henry. I had too much money. I wanted excitement. Doc Darnell mistook me for a double of myself. It was a chance for some fun. My office knew what the deal was about. Tommy tried to get me to drop it, but I wanted something to do. Tommy came a day ahead of me. He said that if I was going to play a damn fool, he wanted to be in there ahead of time."

"His initials were T. H. Fuller?" asked Henry.

"That's right," nodded Travis.

"You have no middle name?" queried Henry.

"I have," replied Travis, "but I never use it. The name is Hezikiah."

"F. H. T.," said Judge. "How are you feeling, Miss Terry?"

"Better, thank you," she whispered. "Frank, I—I heard them talk. They were going to have you sign the papers, and then they were—they were going to put us in that horrible canyon—for the buzzards. Now I can go back and teach school again—and everything will be all right."

"My dear," said Travis quietly, "you are going to marry the biggest fool that ever came to Arizona, and if you can't get

along without schoolhouses, I'll buy you a whole flock of them to play with. We will have the biggest wedding ever held in Wild Horse Valley—and Henry Harrison Conroy will be our best man."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Henry. "The last line spoken—and no one pulled down the curtain. Will someone please go after Doctor Knowles?"

THUNDER and Lightning Mendoza were selected to notify Doctor Knowles, the coroner. They got on their horses and started down the road toward Tonto City, puzzled over what had happened.

"Funny theeng happen tonight; I don' onnerstand heem," said Thunder.

"The way I meesonderstand heem ees like these," explained Lightning. "These ver' pretty senorita wan' schoolhouses; so they domp her eento Lobo Canon on her cabeza—I don' know why, eef you onnerstand w'at I am talking about, my leetle brodder.

"Henry ees keel copple men, biccause I do not know why. Everybody talk togedder and nobody ees say mucho. But everybody green and ees ver' happy, excepts Tony Vega, and then they wan' doctor. W'at you theenk?"

"I am leesten for hearing pretty damn good," stated Thunder, "but I'm can' mak' heads from the tail. One man say he ees come here for play damn fool. He mus' be right, biccause he say he weel buy whole flocks from schoolhouse for the senorita."

"That ees exact from w'at I theenk," agreed Lightning. "Een sometheeng he ees ver' loco, but een sometheeng he ees damn smart."

"Een w'at theeng ees he so damn smart?" asked Thunder.

"W'en he say that Henry ees the bes' man."

PROVES MAN IS GOD

A strange method of mind and body control, that leads to immense powers never before experienced, is announced by Edwin J. Dingle, F.R.G.S., well-known explorer and geographer. It is said to bring about almost unbelievable improvement in power of mind. Many report improvement in health. Others acquire superb bodily strength, secure better positions, turn failure into success. Often, with surprising speed, talents, ability and a more magnetic personality are developed.

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Most of us know that God is everywhere, but never realize that God cannot be everywhere without being also in us. And if He is in us, then all His wisdom, all His power — unlimited knowledge and infinite power — is likewise in us. If God is everywhere, then there is nothing but God, and we also are that — a completely successful human life being the expression of God in man. The Holy Spirit of the Bible is an actual living force in man, and through it we too can do "greater things than these." The method found by Mr. Dingle in Tibet is said to be remarkably instrumental in freeing our minds of the hypnotizing ideas which blind us to the vast power of this living force within us.

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The Institute of Mentalphysics, Dept. A-68, 213 So. Hobart Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif.

A Ruby for Solita

A Quest for a Jewel to Outshine that of a Certain Horse-Faced English Woman!

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

LONG DICCON THE PICAROON—Captain Richard Paradene, of the private armed ship *Sorry Jest,* to all the folk of Port Royal town, save for his crew and his intimates—was aware the instant he entered Solita's house, in Duke of Albemarle Street, that something was very much amiss. The quadroon maids were fluttering distractedly about the lower halls and from above stairs came no tinkling of a guitar or chime of silvery laughter to greet him.

"Solita *mia,*" he called, and after a wait a tearful voice responded:

"Oh, if eet is you, Deecon, come to me for Solita ees mos' unhappy."

He found her in the uppon salon, reclining on a bamboo couch, her eyes swollen and her lovely face discolored from weeping. Solita, whose friends called her the fairest light-o'-love in the Indies—the Spanish Jade to those she refused to receive, and they were many! A friend to pin to, Solita, and whatever other women said of her, one who was respected or feared or envied by every man in Jamaica, from the Governor in Spanish Town and the Port Admiral at the Dockyard to the poorest of the Brethren of the Coast, who roamed the Embarcadero taverns, cadging for drinks or hunting a berth in some stout buccaneer.

"Damme," exclaimed Long Diccon, his lean, dark, Cornish features ascowl, "who has done this to ye, poppet? I'll run steel through him before night."

"Eet was no man," she sobbed.

The picaroon grinned.

"I might ha' known as much! But what wench—?"

"No wench, Deeccon. A grrreat lady, of those who look at me in the street, but weell not speak because I am Solita."

"But sure, lass, y'are accustomed to that," he protested. "A pest on the hussies! Most o' them are not fit to tie your sandals."

She shrugged her shoulders, disdainful now, her mood shifting as spontaneously as a child's in response to his sympathy and the kiss he dropped on her flower face.

"What ees it for a woman in life but to be beautiful? I am content. I am Solita. I am the flame which makes life. I would burrn up one man."

"And y'are not content wi' that?" he commented, laughing.

"But yes, *amigo.*" She yawned daintily like a kitten, and slid lithely to her feet, the little frock of East Indian muslin—he had looted it for her from a galeass of Portugal—clinging to the slender curves of her figure. "It ees that Lady Shoreholme, she who ges come to Fairmont Honor. She who 'ave a face like a 'orse." The great black eyes grew large and lustrous again with tears. "Oh, Deecon," she wailed, "that 'orse-faced woman, she 'ave such jewels! And one, one diamond which comes from the East, so beeg—" she cupped a small hand—"oh, moch more beeg than any jewel you bring Solita."

The picaroon chuckled, and pinched a pink ear.

" 'Sdeath, ye zany, I had thought ye a woman grown by this, but 'twould seem ye ha' a child's craving for toys."

"And why not?" she pouted. "It ees the one boy of Solita, her jewels, and mos' of all the jewels Deeccon brings to her."

"Welladay," he answered as she snuggled into his arms, "ye shall ha' yet a better fardel than Lady Shoreholme, if I can come by it. My fellows ha' had their ration of rum—a pest on the bills they ha' writ for me on every tavern-slate! I'm for sea. Ha' ye news o' the Main? What ha' the Dons toward?"

SHE wrinkled her brows, for Solita was more than a light-o'-love. She possessed widespread sources of information all men craved to share.

"Weell you try for the Flota?" she asked at last. "It nears time for the Porto Bello galleons to sail. And I am tol' the treasure ees mos' grreat thees year."

He put her from him, and paced the room in reflection.

"No," he decided. "If I might call on two or three other men I could trust. But the Flota is beyond one's ship's endeavor. I'll tell ye, lass. I'll ha' word wi' Mendez, and learn what's in his mind."

"Our good Jew," she exclaimed, dancing in delight. "Nevaire fear, Deeccon, weeth him you will make a plan, and you weell be some more reech. Only bring Solita a jewel more beeg than 'ave Milady 'Orseface. Then Solita weell walk out the nex' time the officaires geeve a rrout, and she weell say to them, "Ha, you see what Deeccon 'ave bring Solita? *That* for Milady 'Orseface!' 'Ow they weell laugh!"

Diccon, himself, laughed heartily, as he rarely did.

"Betwixt the pair o' ye I am like to be pushed to my effort's limit," he said. "For if Solita demands a jewel o' price, Mendez will clamor for doubloons to sink in a venture he'll claim will fetch me another fortune." He sobered. "I begin to think I ha' put by enough, lass. 'Twill not be always so in Port Royal. The day comes the Governor will shut down upon us who sail upon the Account. And that day will set Richard Paradene ashore, for no gentleman may ply a sea rogue's trade."

"Tchut," she protested, clutching at the lapels of his gold-embroidered coat to draw his head down upon her cheek until his long brown curls mingled with hers of midnight black. "That day, my Deeccon, you weell sail weeth Solita for the South Sea, and there we weell make a kingdom weeth you for king and Solita for queen."

"Not I," he denied, chuckling. "Solita would burn me up."

"We weell see," she derided, and danced down the stairs beside him to the street door. "Only bring me the jewel more beeg than Milady 'Orseface 'ave. For if you do, by Deeccon, I think it weell

be the mos' beeg jewel in the worl', and for that—you shall see!"

He kissed her lingeringly. Light-o'-love she might be, but no woman was as dear to him nor might he picture in his mind such a venture with any other than Solita.

"Keep in health, lass," he bade her at the doorstep. "Watch against the fever. *A Dios!*"

He settled at a jauntier angle his feathered hat, cocked with a golden quetzal bird, clapped his left hand upon his long rapier's hilt and strode off into the hot sunshine beating down upon the sandy way. The streets were crowded: planters from upcountry to see their factors; officers of the garrison and the King's ships on the station, ogling the ladies in their sedan-chairs, carried by burly negroes, whose bright livery-coats were in amusing contrast with their gleaming bare shanks; fat merchants in seersucker and linen, trotting busily about their affairs; an endless procession of tarry sailors from the shipping anchored behind the sandspit of the Palisades.

ALL passers-by stared curiously at the picaroon, most famous of the gentry of the Account, who used Port Royal town as a base for their unofficial warfare which was sapping the lifeblood of Spain's commerce in those seas where once she had pretended to rule unquestioned. Greetings were showered upon him—"Ha, Diccon! Y'are overlong in port, lad." "How does your honor, Captain Paradene?" He responded courteously, but tarried only once at the Sir Henry Morgan tavern to summon forth his bosun and chief lieutenant, Jack Whitticombe.

"Get the men in hand, bosun," he ordered. "We're like to be sailing speedily. Y'ha' filled water-butts?"

"Aye, aye, sir, and Master Mendez has put aboard a store o' victuals, sheep, fowls and fruit to serve against the scurvy."

"Good! I'll see ye anon."

As he would have continued, he was hailed by a group of young planters, casting dice.

"One main, Paradene, if it be only to see if your luck holds."

He played the main and another, clinking the fat, golden onzas on the table-top for stakes; but he denied a third, all but ruefully.

"'Tis not your day, gentles. Another time, if ye will."

They laughed gaily, since money came to them from sugar and rum well nigh as easily as it did to the picaroon from plundered Spanish ships.

"A pest on ye, sir," they answered. "But luck be wi' ye, if y'are for sea."

He left the tavern, and strolled on along the Embarcadero, pausing again when Phil Shoreholme called to him from beside an elaborately gilded sedan.

"Hither, Captain Paradene! I'd present ye to my lady wife."

And Long Diccon found himself bowing over the scrawny hand of a simpering woman, whose long, bony features and prominent nose merited fully Solita's nickname. Not so spiteful, the little one, he reflected. "Milady 'Orseface," indeed! The diamond was conspicuous on her breast, a very goblet of light. Amused, he pretended to shield his eyes.

"Whoever attends ye should wear blinders, milady!" he exclaimed. "In sooth, a marvelous stone."

She sniggered with self-satisfaction.

"Is't not?" she rumbled. "Milord my father—the Earl of Cadsend, ye wot?—had it of a merchant of the East India Company, who got it—the Lord wots how!—from the Diwan of the Grand Mogul's self. I'm told 'tis matchless."

Long Diccon bowed gravely, smoothing the mirth from his face with difficulty.

"I can well believe as much," he assented. "I must be on my way, ma'am. Your ladyship's servant. Mr. Shoreholme, your most obedient."

Safe out of earshot, he chuckled to himself. "Diccon, lad," he ruminated, "I mis-

doubt me Solita has set ye a task overlarge. God send the Spaniards ha' been diligent o' late."

PRESENTLY, upon the edge of town, he arrived at the warehouse of Isaac Mendez, the Spanish Jew, who conducted his business affairs. Mendez was a man after Diccon's own heart, tall, unstooped, with the features and proud bearing of an hidalgo, moreover one who hated the persecutors of his race beyond the bitterness even of the Cornishman. They loved each other, these two, almost as father and son, the bonds betwixt them firmed by joint respect and a common purpose.

Mendez looked up now, as Diccon entered the cool half light of the counting-room, a smile of affection relieving the austerity of his face.

"Ha, lad, I ha' this minute finished conning your manifest. Ye ha' done well by us; but I have rich openings for ye will require sums in addition to what these goods will fetch. There's a planter beyond the crest of the Blue Mountains is drinking himself to death. Can ye not find me the wherewither to buy him out? But I see ye ha' somewhat on your mind, and the planter will wait. What d'ye seek o' me?"

"Counsel, Isaac, old friend," Diccon rejoined. "I'm for sea wi' the tide's turn."

And he went on to describe, vastly to the old Jew's amusement, the plight of Solita. Mendez loved her, even as he did the picaroon, cared for her interests, too, and had earned for her profit sums which the good folk of Port Royal discussed with bated breaths.

"Now, by the Law of the Prophets," he cried, "I'll not ha' the little one put upon by any barren earl's daughter, whose father has filched a diamond I'll testify is rich only for its bigness. I ha' seen it, Diccon lad, and well I know there are richer stones. For what she says o' the Flota, ye are in the right. Yet let us ponder the point. There are more ways o' frying the Dons than by cannonfire."

He strode up and down the length of the counting-room, tugging at his white beard, until an Indian boy entered upon an errand and promptly would have withdrawn, with an ingratiating smile of apology for the famous picaroon.

Mendez slapped his thigh.

"Bide, Manuelito!" he exclaimed. "Ye ha' come in a good hour. Diccon, I believe I ha' the answer to your need. 'Twill mean a bold risk, but ye'd never say nay to that." He turned to the Indian, who stood stolidly by the door. "Are ye minded to sail wi' Captain Paradene, and mayhap knife a Spaniard or two?"

The Indian's face hardened; his body tensed.

"Si, senor, there's naught would please me more."

"I made certain o' ye, lad," Mendez approved. And he continued to Diccon: "Ye must know this Manuelito was of the household of the Viceroy of Granada, who holds jurisdiction over the treasure city of Porto Bello. He knows the city well—and he bears on his back the stripes of his masters. He has been in Porto Bello when the armadas of the Flota made rendezvous from La Vera Cruz and Carthagena and La Guayra, and filled their holds wi' the gold and silver of the Veragua mines, and the treasures from Peru and Manila which are fetched overland from Panama. Mark well I cite the manila galleon, which plies the Pacific eastward every year in time to insure its cargo may be transported across the Isthmus against the Flota's departure. 'Tis from Manila the Spaniards obtain their richest jewels, and the venture I'd set ye to will not permit the looting of treasures as weighty as gold and silver. My plan is that ye two should gain entrance to the city. The little one spoke rightly when she said we were hard upon the time of the Flota's sailing." He paused. "It likes ye, my plan?"

Long Diccon's nostrils twitched.

"None better," he returned.

Mendez crossed to an armoire whence he

produced a creased, brown sheet of parchment.

"I ha' kept this for a purpose," he said, "albeit what that would be I never knew. Take it."

The picaroon discovered the document to be a passport, inscribed over the style of the Captain-General of Guatemala, in the name of Senor Don Francisco de Beneventes y Cuala.

"That," resumed Mendez, "will carry ye anywhere on the Main. And this—" he fumbled in a pocket to pluck forth a catseye set in silver filagree—"will pass ye wi' a Portuguese friend o' mine, Barach Souza, who contrives—by what sacrifiec of pride and comfort I'll not say—to conduct a business in Porto Bello. For the rest—" he spread out his hands in a gesture of deprecation—"I'm told the jewel merchants gather at the posada of San Pedro. Y'are not one to require advice in action, Diccon lad."

The picaroon's brown eyes had turned as hard and black as chips of basalt, glittering with a keen, hungry light.

"Aye, 'tis a likely venture," he agreed. "Tell me, Manuelito, may I pass in the Spanish?"

The Indian nodded, his coppery features duskier for his excitement. Mendez put in sarcastically:

"A Gallego would think ye a neighing Arroganese; an Arroganese would hold ye a guttural Gallego; and a clip-speeched Castillian might credit ye a Catalan burdened with his own dialect. They are no more than a band of tribes after the manner of my unfortunate people. Ye'll pass, Diccon." His expression softened as he gripped the picaroon's hand. "May Jehovah guard ye, lad."

IT WAS nigh twilight when the *Sorry Jest* stood out to sea past the Palisades. Chocked betwixt main and foremast was a bongo of seaworthy size, one of those Indian dugout canoes which plied the coasts of the Main. And on a late afternoon several weeks later her masthead lookouts sighted against the sunset glow the low lying walls and turrets of Porto Bello, rising above the swamps and green jungle which encompassed them. She lay to until midnight, when the bongo was hoisted overside and Diccon gave his parting instructions to Whitticombe—it was not his custom to carry other officers, save a gunner; poopdeck officers were a source of intrigue amongst the picaroons.

"Run from any sail as her course dictates, bosun, but be hereabouts as ye may. How long we may be I cannot say. If 'tis a week, we are lost, and ye should steer for Port Royal and seek counsel of Mendez."

"Oh, never ye fear, sir," answered Whitticombe, sweating for his own fear. "Ye'll come safe. Sure, ye ha' codded the Dons in their lairs afore this. As for us, we'll bide for ye, 'less'n the ship is swamped or the admadas sink us."

"Do as I bid ye," Diccon rejoined sternly, and went overside after Manuelito as casually as though he were in Port Royal harbor. Of his customary magnificence he retained no more than his rapier and the feathered hat with the golden quetzal bird. For complement to these, he wore an artfully tarnished costume such as would become a Spanish gallant, who had lost all but pride of rank.

Just before sunrise, Manuelito steered the bongo into the mouth of a creek masked by a growth of mangroves, and here they lay snugly through the midday hours, plagued by mosquitoes, but secure from the prowling galleys of the Garda Costa. Putting forth again, they skirted the coastline, with the square tower of the treasure city's cathedral for their landmark. As they drew closer, the gray walls of the fortifications seemed to rise immediately out of the creamy surf to seaward, whilst inland the lush, green masses of the jungle crept almost to the edge of the moat with an effect of implacable hostility. A soft, yet malignant, halo of mist brooded over the

place. There was a sheen of cannon in embrasures; helmets twinkled behind the battlements; in the harbor a half-score galleons rode to anchor, twin belts of ordnance grinning toothily from their sides as the bongo passed in betwixt the outer guardian castles.

THE Indian beached their craft in the mud of the jungle-girt shore across the harbor from the city, and tied the bow-rope to a tree. Opposite their berth the barrier of foliage was broken by a narrow opening, the beginning of a trail, he explained, which led around the head of the harbor to the Land Gate. Within the leafy portals the dwindling light of day was replaced by a steamy green twilight, uncanny and oppressive, the hot silence relieved only by tiny rustlings of the wild creatures fleeing their muffled footsteps; but they had not yet reached the trail's junction with the Panama road when Manuelito raised a warning finger, and Diccon heard, muted in the distance, a tinkling of mule-bells, the hoarse objurgations of muleteers and the snarling curses of Spanish soldiery, slapping at the swarming insects which attacked with renewed vigor in the lull of the scanty wind preluding dusk.

"A treasure train," murmured the Indian. "We'd best push faster, Senor Deeccon."

Long Diccon nodded, and they took the trail at a trot, which they reduced to a swinging stride as they entered the road and the arch of the Land Gate loomed beyond the drawbridge over the moat. The officer of the guard made no difficulty about Diccon's passport, but as he returned it his eye was caught by the shimmering beauty of the quetzal bird.

"By the Mass, senor," he commented, "that is a handsome trifle on your hat! I'll gamble a main with you for it."

Diccon drew himself up very haughtily and said:

"Know, senor," he retorted, "that is a possession of my family from the days of the Conquest, and it may not be won, save by the sword."

"If you will, Senor Cabellero," shrugged the officer. "I'll wager you upon those terms. There is little for one's diversion in this pest-hole."

Diccon bowed stiffly.

"It may be I shall reside here, pending the sailing of the Flota," he returned. "Always at the service of any proper cabellero, senor"

And pouching his passport, he strode through the gateway past the idling sentries, Manuelito at his heels. They were a good half-block farther on before he muttered to the Indian:

"Search out the house of Souza, the Jew. Ye'll find me at the posada of San Pedro—where said ye 'twas?"

"On your left as ye come into San Miguel Street, two blocks ahead," replied the boy, flitting into the shadows of an alley.

Diccon had heard many tales of the bustle and turmoil which descended twice a year upon Porto Bello: when the Flota arrived from Spain, and again when the armadas were prepared for the homeward voyage. So he was not surprised by the crowds of merchants and Indian and Negro slaves, the teeming posadas and the washed-out sailors—most of the poor devils had caught the fever which drifted on the miasmas out of the surrounding jungles. The most unhealthy place in the Indies, Porto Bello. Two-thirds of the year it was deserted by all its inhabitants who had elsewhere to go. Then the city became an echoing waste of empty houses, huddling within the walls as if for protection from the jungle's evil breath, so evil that the unfortunate sentries of the garrison, walking the ramparts, cursed it for a living thing of murderous intent, and very often went crazy and shot themselves or leaped into the sea.

The posada of San Pedro was a rambling structure built around a courtyard crammed with tired mules and oxen. To

the left of the street entrance was the ordinary, a long room dimly lit by rush-lamps and hazy with the smoke of innumerable cigarros. Diccon entered it with his habitual swagger, but few of the patrons noticed him; the hum of conversation sounded like the volley firing of arquebusiers on the far side of a hill. He was about to select a seat when his attention was drawn to a group who were peering over one another's shoulders, exclaiming and questioning. And more because he had no appetite at the moment than for any definite reason, he threaded a path to the outer fringe of the huddle, whence his height enabled him to see the object of their curiosity.

Two men sat at a corner table, their backs to the walls. One was short and fat, the soiled lace of his collar emphasizing the tallowy complexion of his drooping jowls; the other was skinny in build, his gaunt features as repulsive as a bustard's, his little, beady eyes set close to a prodigious hooked nose. In front of the pair on the table was a sparkle and glitter of light and color which made the picaroon, used as he was to handling such things, fairly catch his breath. Clear white, hard green, cerulean blue, deep, glowing red, the jewels scattered in their opened wrappings formed the most gorgeous collection he had ever seen. And he listened avidly to the murmurs of the onlookers.

"Senor Estiguarez, the Manila merchant —yes, the thin one," a man was saying. "He is dealing with Senor Molenda, who buys for the King."

"Eh, and two of the same cut of pork," was the answer.

"Aye, so, senor," rejoined the first. "A Jew would be merciful beside that pair!"

Estiguarez, it was apparent, was becoming impatient with the deliberate tactics of Molenda.

"God's wounds, senor," he cried in a high, whining voice, "I must call you to mind that I have a greater journey before me than yourself. If I am not at Panama betimes I shall miss the Manila galleon, and be delayed a year in resuming my affairs."

"Patience, patience, senor," squeaked the fat man. "I am sure there is no gentleman here but will agree I must conduct myself as becomes one responsible to the King's Majesty." He ducked his head devoutly. "Here, 'tis true, are certain jewels of price, but many I am not so certain of. I must take my time, senor, or else withdraw."

Estiguarez made a finicky gesture of annoyance.

"You are demanding, senor. So be it! I have a bauble here you have not yet seen." He reached into his shabby vest, and produced a parcel the size of a clenched fist, which he proceeded to unwrap with a deliberation exceeding Molenda's. "Heh, heh," he chuckled, "what think you of this?"

There was a gasp from the onlookers. Out of the layers of leather and silk rolled a ruby the size of a pullet's egg, a ruby exquisitely cut, every facet drawing the lamplight to it, and then seeming to suck the rays to the stone's heart and project them forth again, brighter, ruddier, more intense in brilliancy and color. Long Diccon's fingers tightened on his rapier-hilt; his eyes narrowed and darkened. So far as he knew, there did not exist the mate of that stone, none to match it either in size or in the perfection which gave it the semblance of a living flame.

Molenda started forward in his seat, then recollected himself and sank back, a hint of moisture on his thick lips.

"A—a good stone," he admitted grudgingly. And as Estiguarez made to restore it to its wrappings, he added with a wolfish grimace: "No, no, senor! Where got you it?"

Estiguarez paused to enjoy the effect he had achieved.

"Why, senor," he answered finally, "I risked much for this ruby. I had it of a sowar, who was of the band that assassinated the Rajah of Khamsum, and fled with

the palace spoils to the Portuguese at Goa. You'll not suggest the stone lacks authenticity? It has a history a thousand years old."

Molenda moistened his lips again, one hand fingering the beautiful thing, weighing it, turning it this way and that to gloat over its fiery heart; and the rapacity in his eyes, the sneering greed in the Manila merchant's, steeled Diccon to an instant decision. At the moment a hand plucked at his sleeve, and Manuelito's voice whispered in his ear:

"I ha' found the house, senor."

Diccon nodded in sign that he understood, and bent forward to hear what Molenda was saying.

"—over-public, senor, for bargaining. If it please you, and these gentlemen will excuse us"—he bowed in placation to the onlookers—"we will repair to my chamber on the courtyard. It may be—I cannot estimate offhand what I may be able to pay—but it may be we may arrive at a mutual accommodation."

Diccon turned on his heel, and followed Manuelito through the confusion of the ordinary.

"Quick," he said. "Take me to Souza."

No one heeded them in the misty dusk which shrouded the thronged streets. The folk of Porto Bello were busy about their own affairs. And preoccupied though he was, Diccon could not help being impressed by the extravagance of wealth on every hand. Bars of gold and silver were stacked like bricks on the sidewalks; bags of doubloons, piece-of-eight and onzas were heaped alongside them; casks, bales and chests, redolent of the Orient, were tumbled profusely in the open doors of warehouses. Long columns of sweating slaves toiled down to the Water Gate, where lay the lighters waiting to transport these riches to the galleons in the harbor. It was evident that where treasures beyond men's dreams were the common stock of commerce no temptation to pilfer was supposed to exist—perhaps because the bulk of them was consigned to that impersonal and all powerful body, the Council of the Indies.

Manuelito led the way into a shabby lane trending to the left from the main street, and stopped before a house of two stories which seemed to melt into the gray mass of the city wall behind it. The heavily-shuttered windows were as dark as the gathering night. Long Diccon rapped on the massive door. A shuffling step was audible within, and a quavery voice inquired

"Is it his excellency the Alguazil Mayor?"

"I come from Isaac Mendez," replied Diccon.

Bolts were withdrawn, and a streak of light broadened as the door swung hesitantly inward. In the gap appeared a wisp of an old man, graybearded, pallid, stoop-shouldered, very different from Mendez' proud figure. At sight of Diccon's plumed hat and rapier he stepped back a pace, exclaiming:

"But you said, senor—"

Diccon smiled, and presented the cats-eye. The old man's face brightened.

"Come in, senor," he said. "I had thought you the Alguazil Mayor or the Commandante's self, come to harry me for a loan—and Jehovah knows if I charge fair interest they threaten me with the Inquisition." He rebarred the door. "But you are not of our people?"

"I am a Cornishman, which is to say an Englishman."

The Jew seized his hand.

"All my life I have wished to grasp an Englishman's hand," he cried. "Scourges of the persecutors of my race! May the Lord God reward your nation, senor! What can I do for you? Ask, and whatever you wish the answer shall be yes.

"I ask much, Senor Souza," replied the picaroon. "I am about to attempt a small task of scourging a certain pair of Spaniards, the Senors Estiguarez and Molenda—"

"I know those children of the Evil One," the Jew interrupted eagerly. "They are ripe for punishment."

"Good," said Diccon. "Now, briefly, how may I pass the walls afterward undetected?"

"From my roof," Souza responded promptly. "I have a ladder, and with a rope—"

Diccon cut him short.

"My time is limited. If ye will be ready—"

Souza hastened to open the door.

"Let your mind be at ease, senor," he asserted. "So soon as it is done, I will bide here awaiting you. Knock three times, if it please you."

A moment later, Long Diccon was outside with Manuelito.

"Now, for the posada," he said exultantly. " 'Two o' the same cut o' pork!' "

At the entrance to the tavern, he checked the Indian.

"Bide here," he instructed, "and see your knife be loose."

"Si, senor," murmured Manuelito, his eyes shining with expectation. "It is thirsty for Spanish blood."

Diccon stepped through the archway into the ordinary, and stopped a drawer.

"I have a message for Senor Estiguarez," he said.

"Senor Estiguarez is engaged," returned the man.

The picaroon slipped a piece-of-eight into his hand.

"This is an affair of importance."

The drawer grinned knowingly.

"Aye, so, excellency. The second room to the left within the courtyard. And I take liberty to hope your excellency may outbid the thrice-accursed one who is with him. 'Tis few eights he parts with."

"Never fear, lad," rejoined Diccon, and had his foot on the threshold when a hand was clapped on his shoulder.

"Ho, Senor Golden Bird," a voice spoke behind him. " 'Twas my thought we were to have a try at sword-play, you and I."

Diccon wheeled to confront the officer of the guard at the Land Gate. He removed the hand from his shoulder very gently.

"Ah, 'tis you, senor," he said. "For the moment I am urgently engaged. Who have I the honor of addressing?"

The officer, who obviously had drunk several stoops of wine, swelled out his chest.

"Know, senor," he replied, "I am the Senor Don Carlos de Portayo, Captain in the Terza of Galicia, and I can match quarterings with—"

"I doubt it not," Diccon interrupted soothingly. "But grant me the period of half a glass." He swept off his hat, and bowed. "Your humblest servant, senor. I kiss your hands and feet."

The officer fingered his sword-hilt, undecidedly; but there was that about Diccon which impressed him. He made up his mind.

"Aye, so," he said. "You have the look of a true cabellero, senor. I shall await you."

And the picaroon strode forth of the ordinary's din, murmuring to himself:

"Diccon, Diccon, may your luck be wi' ye!"

The second door on the left in the courtyard was bordered by a chink of light. Inclining his ear toward it, Diccon heard no whine or squeak of voices, only a barely audible panting as of a man hardpressed. He glanced around to make certain he was unobserved, lifted the latch and slipped inside.

Estiguarez was sprawled on the floor, a trickle of blood oozing down his vest. Molenda was leaning over a table, so rapt in contemplation of what lay before him that he did not turn until the latch clicked shut. Sudden terror dawned in the fat man's eyes; he grabbed frantically at the spoils of his deed, glittering wickedly on the bare boards. But Diccon was on him in two strides. He had time only to gabble:

"He attacked me! I tell you, senor—"

Diccon caught him by the throat, and

hurled him into a corner of the room; his head crunched against the stones of the wall, and he lay still. The picaroon made sure in one lightning glance that the ruby was there, scooped the gems into his pocket and walked out the door as quietly as he had entered it.

He had gained the archway, undisturbed, when de Portayo stepped from the shadows.

"Not so fast, Senor Golden Bird," commanded the officer of the guard.

Diccon ripped his rapier from its sheath.

"If you are so anxious to die, 'tis not for me to deny you," he answered coolly.

The blades clashed in the dim light. Diccon cursed softly. In daylight, now! But there was no help for it, and he fenced warily, intent upon keeping his rapier in contact with the Spaniard's, so that his opponent might find no opening for an unexpected coup. De Portayo was a strong swordsman, if reckless. He pressed the attack, and from the ordinary came a buzz of curiosity as the cling-clang of steel echoed under the achway. A man appeared in the entrance, called to those within—and choked in his throat as Manuelito's knife was driven home. The buzz became a roar.

Here was no time for precision of skill, Diccon told himself, and exerting all his strength, he swept the Spaniard's sword aside and leaped to close quarters, hammering his reversed hilt into de Portayo's face.

"Ah, Dios," moaned the Spaniard, collapsing to the cobbles.

Diccon jumped the prostrate body, and stormed into the group eddying out of the ordinary. Thrust! Thrust! A startled outcry.

"'Ware steel!" 'Tis a madman!"

Next he was in the street, Manuelito at his elbow. They dodged, without speaking, into the nearest alley, and the Indian steered an erratic course, heading always in the direction of Souza's house. The hue and cry faded behind them, became a faint growl as Diccon knocked on the old Jew's door, which swung inward before the last knock had ceased to reverberate in the lane.

"Upstairs," quavered the old man, busying himself with the bolts.

He rejoined them on the roof, panting heavily.

"The ladder." He indicated a slender fabric propped against the city wall, rearing a dozen feet above them; its machicolations forming gaps in the mist-draped skyline. "The rope is slung, senor. Haste, I pray you!"

Diccon made to put a purse in his hand, but he pushed it away.

"I am sufficiently rewarded in aiding the defenders of my people," he said with dignity.

"Then do ye accept my gratitude for life!" Diccon exclaimed warmly. "Isaac Mendez shall have good word o' ye, Senor Souza."

THEY were on the wall in a trice. Diccon fumbled for the bulge of the rope knotted around one of the machicolations, climbed over and lowered himself cautiously into the water of the shallow moat. A twitch, and Manuelito followed him and they waded shoulder-deep, the Indian upheld by Diccon's strong arm, to the farther side. Here, Manuelito scrambled out with Diccon's help, and offered his wiry muscles to assist the picaroon in scaling the rough, sloping stone face. As they raced for the jungle the town was in an uproar, but the Land Gate was closed for the night and not a soul appeared to check on them in gaining the path around the harbor, which Manuelito threaded with the unerring instinct of his people.

Diccon chuckled as they shoved the bongo into deep water, and hoisted sail.

"This was a venture for the Senorita Solita, Manuelito," he said, rattling the gems in his pocket. "But there will be broad gold pieces for all o' us after Senor Mendez has done his stint. I am pleased wi' ye, lad. Y'ha' played a man's part."

"Ah, Senor Deeccon," Manuelito an-

swered in his gentle voice, "what else could come of your excellency's luck?"

In the city, torches flared, and a remote babble of voices heralded the Spaniards' bewilderment. But the armadas rode silently to their anchors, crews placidly contemptuous of the possibility that a mad Englishman might dare to breach the security of the treasure city of the Main; and not a challenge hailed the bongo as she sped through the misty darkness betwixt the frowning castles guarding the harbor mouth.

The quadroon maids received Diccon smilingly in the house in Duke of Albemarle Street. Above stairs a guitar was tinkling gaily, a silvery voice was raised in a snatch of song.

"Are ye alone, little one?" Diccon called up the stairs.

"Deeccon! But 'ow else when I 'ave seen your sheep come in?"

A gale of swirling muslin flew down to hurl itself upon his chest. Bare arms encircled his neck to draw down his head to perfect lips. He looked into lustrous eyes, eyes which many a man had felt he could drown himself in.

"Oh, my Deeccon! 'Ow brown you are! 'Ow beeg—always I think you are more beeg!"

"Ha' ye missed me, lass?"

"Always Solita meess you, Deeccon," she answered simply. "But now I am 'appy because you 'ave come."

"Look ye, lass," he said. "I am pressed for time—I ha' business wi' Mendez. But there was this I fetched ye o' purpose because o' the tears ye shed my last day in port." He drew the great ruby from his pocket, and her eyes widened, her lips puckered in a longdrawn "Ooooh!" like a child's. "There!" he continued proudly. "Saw ye ever the like?"

"It ees beautiful, Deeccon," she cried. "It ees more beautiful than any jewel Solita 'ave seen. It ees the mos' beautiful jewel in the whole worl'!"

She took it, and gazed into its fiery heart, fascinated, bespelled.

"It ees 'out," she said. "It burrns—like Solita."

"Aye," he agreed. "And now ye need grieve no more for that handful o' cold fire Milady Horseface wears."

She pouted.

"Oh, that one! Milady 'Orseface ees dead of the fever two weeks since. And ever since Solita play' the guitar and sing. If only you 'ad come before, Deeccon!"

He stared at her, then burst into sardonic laughter.

"Aye, and three men died for it, too," he said. "Well, 'tis a sightly fardel, lass. Wear it, if it pleases ye."

"But of course eet pleases me!" she exclaimed. "Many women look at Solita like Milady 'Orseface. Oh, my Deeccon, 'ow I love you! You bring me the mos' beautiful jewels. And this! This ees like the heart of Solita. See!" She laid the ruby on her breast. "I shall wear it 'ere for all to see—the heart of Solita, which is 'ot to touch."

Long Diccon kissed her lightly on the cheek.

"God send them be not amany Solitas in this world," he said. And walked out into Duke of Albemarle Street, shaking his head.

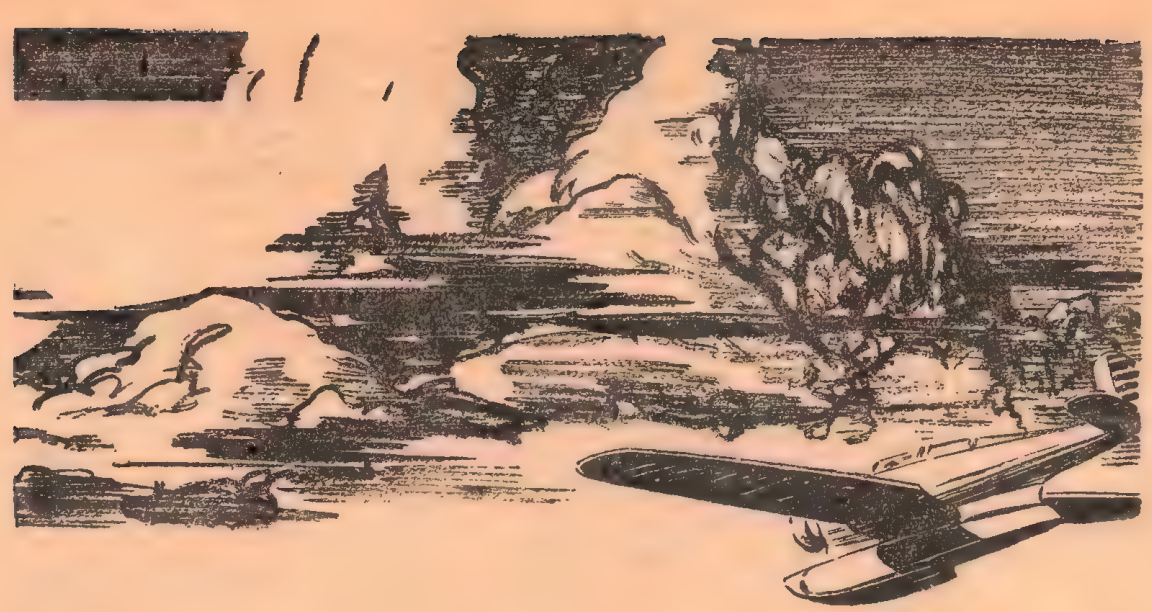
. . . After All, French Is Still the Language of Diplomacy— Even the Diplomacy of Death

DEATH AT HISPANIOLA

By WILLIAM DU BOIS

TEN THOUSAND feet above the Caribbean, dead on the beam, the American transport plane snored through the tattered mists of the sunrise. Co-pilot Travis wandered drowsily out of the galley, with a coffee cup in his hand. For a long moment he stood at a porthole, watching the white-hot rays of the morning spread fan-wise in the eastern sky, around the unreal, indigo mass that was Haiti.

Strange how this nightmare fatigue had oppressed him for the past hour. Perhaps it was the aftermath of Havana; perhaps it was only the first impact of the tropics on New England blood. But he could feel his eyelids droop, as he stood at the porthole, waiting for the landfall ahead to assume visible form. *Haiti, the Hispaniola of Columbus. Lush empire of the black Napoleons, Toussaint and Christophe.* Co-pilot Travis skipped a century or two



—shook himself firmly—and marched down the aisle to his job.

Five passengers had come aboard at Santiago, and Travis ticketed them, dimly, as he passed. The Ph.D. from Columbia, bound for San Juan; the honeymooners from Ciudad Trujillo; the gloomy government agent, hugging his briefcase in a forward seat. Last—but far from least, in Travis' eyes—the little brunette with the heart-stopping figure, whose husband was waiting for her in Trinidad, who had promised to dine with him tonight at the Habanera, just the same.

Co-pilot Travis paused beside her seat for an extra minute—cocking an attentive eye the while at the glass box of the pilots' nest, and the head of his senior, Hal Hardy, immovable as a robot at the dual controls.

"Forgotten our date, now it's morning?"

"Do I look like the sort of girl who forgets? Incidentally, *you* look as though you'd just been through a war. What have you been drinking?"

"Nothing but an extra cup of our steward's best coffee," said Travis indignantly. Then he remembered that courtesy was a watchword of the air-line, and added, gallantly. *"See what a pair of blue eyes can do?"*

But it had nothing to do with the spell of a blue-eyed brunette. Travis realized that clearly, as he slammed the door of

the pilots' coop, and sat down unsteadily beside Hardy at the dual controls. Numbness had already crept into his fingertips; he could scarcely feel the pressure of his ear-phones, as he clicked on his radio-switch, and began to talk to the control-tower in Port-au-Prince—now a mere fifteen miles' distant in the pellucid morning. Only there was nothing clear-cut about the new daylight now, so far as Travis was concerned. Even the bulk of Haiti on the eastern horizon was a smoky blur, a part of the nightmare that screamed for attention from each sick nerve.

"Number 636 reporting on time. Riding the beam. Shall we come in, Haiti?"

"Come in, 636."

"Thank you, Mister." His voice, too, had a thin edge of hysteria. Travis glanced covertly at Hardy, waiting for the rebuke that did not come. And then, despite his reeling senses, Travis saw that Hardy was

through with rebukes forever—that the senior pilot was flying blind, in more ways than one, though the cold hands on the joy-stick still held the ship on her course, with grotesque accuracy, though the sightless eyes still seemed to measure the horizon ahead.

Co-pilot Travis opened his mouth to scream, but no sound came.

In the control-tower at Port-au-Prince a bored traffic manager checked Transport 636 *on time,* before he slammed his log-book and resumed his crossword puzzle. And at that same moment, fifteen miles at sea, an apparently innocent fishing launch opened its throttle wide, to roar eastward as a plane's shadow passed overhead—a shadow that plunged sharply toward the blue ocean floor, and zoomed again, as Co-pilot Travis half-rose to his feet in the pilots' coop to wrench the controls from Hardy's dead hands.

He could hear the dim shouts of passengers, from far away, the crash of luggage in the baggage compartment beyond. Then the plane righted again, as he fumbled for his seat—for a place in the world that had ebbed so strangely from consciousness. For a moment more, his mind groped in blackness. He was shouting in earnest, now—gibberish, not words. Then the blackness was absolute, and never-ending. His head struck crashingly against the instrument panel, and rested there.

The little brunette had already wrenched open the glass door, to drop to her knees beside him.

"Do something, someone. Can't you see he's fainted?"

"Fainted hell," said the Ph.D. from Columbia. "Both of them are as dead as they'll ever be."

"For God's sake, call the steward," cried the government agent. As he spoke his hand darted toward the instrument panel, and drew back just as quickly—as though the row of bright-polished dials were individual sticks of dynamite.

The honeymooners from Ciuad Trujillo said nothing. They were still in their seats, with their arms still entwined—praying in a Spanish that was no less intense because it was silent. A prayer that ended in a kind of banshee wail, as the plane twisted sickeningly in a deep air-pocket.

The steward came out of his cubby on the run—a precise little man in a snug white jacket, a silken bundle clutched firmly under one arm.

"Stand back, if you please. I can manage this."

THE passengers returned to their seats—grimly, and in haste. As the steward turned slowly on the points of his toes, they had all observed that he carried an automatic hugged to his right side. Just as they had grasped the fact that the silken bundle under his free arm was a parachute—the only one aboard.

The steward worked in the pilots' coop—with an ease that indicated careful planning. Crouched in their seats, the passengers heard the crash of his gun-butt, smashing into the two-way radio, smelled the acrid tang of burning varnish, as he ripped wiring from the instrument board. Now he was coming out to them—precise as ever, smiling a little, the parachute already strapped firmly to his shoulders.

"Don't waste time on the auxiliary motor, any of you. I cut the wiring on that one, before we left Santiago—"

The little brunette flung herself at him with a full-throated scream. The steward stopped her in the aisle, with one careless back-hand slap, as he wrenched open the landing-door.

All of them rushed to watch him go—to see him spiral seaward, floating in maddening security as the chute billowed open, a scant five hundred feet above the water. All of them watched a sailor rise up in the motor launch to signal him—saw the steward raise his hand in an answering salute.

And then Flight 636 went into a wild tail-spin, as its left-wing motor died, as

the first red tongue of flame ran hungrily from short-circuit to gas-line. No one in that ship was watching the chutist now; no one spoke save the Dominican honeymooners, still locked in a tight embrace as the sea rushed up to meet them. For a brief moment a high keen of Spanish rang out across the sea-washed morning—before a hideous, bubbling dive engulfed all other sounds.

II

FOUR mornings later a three-passenger Lockheed amphibian criss-crossed this same course—low above the dark floor of the sea, with all the thoroughness of a questing gull. An oddly-assorted trio peered down at the ocean floor—and the dark mass of Haiti, fifteen miles to the east. An ash-blond giant, with shoulders that would put a fullback to shame. A slight, cameo-fine man, in oddly military gabardine, whose intent eyes seemed to take in whole horizons at a glance. Oddest of all was the dark otter of a man at the joy-stick—a full-blooded Seminole, indomitable and eternally proud.

The man in gabardine spoke softly. "Well, Michael, has the picture registered now?"

"We had the picture in Cuba this morning," murmured the ash-blond giant. "Why the travelogue?"

"I wanted you to admire a perfectly-planned job, before *we* get down to business."

Michael Towne subsided willingly. Michael had teamed with Christopher Ames for a long time, now; he was used to these elaborate instructions when a case was in the making; an investigation this particular trio had commenced only yesterday, in close liaison with a certain Federal Bureau in Washington. The ash-blond giant did not even protest, too strongly, when Ames tapped the Seminole's shoulder—and Willy Emathda brought the amphibian into a long, sweet bank, to bore due north, with both motors throbbing.

"I thought we were headed for Port-au-Prince, Kit."

"D'you mind a slight detour, first? Port-au-Prince is the tourists' Haiti, after all. First, I will show you the *real* Haiti, in microcosm, as it were. Believe me, this detour has an important bearing on our—our current problem."

"Go ahead, Kit. You know I've trained myself to listen."

Ames spoke deliberately. "Last Thursday, the passenger plane from Santiago crashed in the sea near here. There were no apparent witnesses—and no trace of survivors. However, the charred wreckage floated, in spite of everything; next morning, it was washed ashore at Rale-sur-Mer, a fishing village on the Cap. The bodies of the two pilots were still crouched over the controls; all five of the passengers were also identified, with fair accuracy. Only the steward was missing—"

Ames let the thought trail into silence, as he stared down at the pattern of the island far below them. The amphibian was winging across the great, brown claw of the Cap now, to bank away for the coast again—shadowing a deep ravine with its wing-tips, a jungle that was green and dripping before Adam was a wish-bone.

"An autopsy was difficult, in the circumstances," Ames continued. "Nevertheless, an autopsy of a sort was performed at Port-au-Prince yesterday. It was impossible to prove that either of the pilots met death by violence, before the crash. It was also impossible to find any trace of poison. But that does not preclude the use of poison as a method—"

"We've been over that, too, Kit."

Christopher Ames ignored the interruption. "There are poisons that leave no trace, days after the event. That medical fact, plus the disappearance of the steward, gives color to my theory that poison was the method. Obviously, the plane did not go out of control by chance. It seems

equally obvious that John Hopkins, the American government agent was marked as a victim, from the moment that plane left Santiago."

"Hold on now, Kit. If someone wanted to stop Hopkins from reaching Port-au-Prince, he could have been cut down *en route,* for a price. It wasn't necessary to stage a group funeral for seven—"

"Naturally not—save for one reason. Hopkins was an important man—so important, that the Haitian government knew he was traveling incognito. His mission was just as important—to close terms for the lease of a refueling base at La Villette, to be used by American planes of all types, during the present emergency—"

MICHAEL TOWNE picked up the thread. "So his death had to look like an accident—is that it?"

"Exactly. Of course, Washington will be sending another agent to close the deal—if that is still possible. In the meantime, there is inevitable delay. Red tape to cut, at both ends. For all we know, the Haitian government may hesitate to close the lease. Remember, the memories of our army occupation are still green at Port-au-Prince. In short, Hopkins' death, on the very threshold of his mission, may have upset the apple cart for fair. While we wait, our Caribbean defense-belt is without an important link. A link that may well be vital."

"Does that mean you think Berlin is back of Hopkins' death?"

"I think Berlin paid for his death, with cash on the line. I'm also quite sure that that plane-crash was plotted, to the last detail, by a well-knit organization here in Haiti—" Ames glanced casually down, at the changing panorama of sea and jungle. "In just five minutes more, we'll be flying over the home of the organization's president—"

"Say that again, please."

"You've read of our murder rings in America, Michael. Imagine the same thing in the West Indies, organized on a truly feudal basis, and managed by a genius in the line. A one-man juggernaut, in fact, that'll crush out anyone's life for a price, from here to Trinidad—and back by way of Panama. Death with an artist's touch. Death, whose instrument may be white arsenic today—a black zombie tomorrow—"

"And you *know* the boss of this racket—"

"Not personally, so far—though I expect to call on him later today. His name is Jean Saulier."

"Good God! You mean, the sugar king?"

"I mean the owner of Ile Caiman, a few miles up the coast," said Ames easily. "As you know, he's one of the few white landowners in Haiti—and one of the most respected. He is also an absolute monarch in his own domain. A good thousand acres of prime cane-fields on the island alone. Twice that acreage on the adjoining mainland, plus a grinding mill, a standard-gauge railroad, a private village for his more trusted employees—"

"Are you telling me that this is all front for his real racket?"

"I'm telling you that he built this little empire as a sideline, out of profits." Ames smiled thinly. "The palace is magnificent, despite the bodies in the basement."

Michael Towne let out his breath in a long whistle. "But people don't do such things."

"Life is cheap, throughout the Indies, Michael; all things are possible in a voodoo republic like Haiti — including Jean Saulier. I wouldn't class him with *people,* if I were you. Outwardly, he's a handsome specimen of homo sapiens. I doubt if he's at all human underneath—"

"Why has he lasted so long?"

"Wheels within wheels," murmured Ames. "Or should I say, bribes within bribes? Naturally, he's kept his own hands clean for years now, so far as the local authorities are concerned. Even if we could

pin Hopkins' death on his door—which we emphatically can't do, at the moment—we'd have the devil's own time getting him out of Haiti. Remember the last job we did in Havana?" Once more, Ames permitted himself the luxury of a thin-lipped smile. "No, Michael—the Biblical parable of the wicked, who flourish as the green bay tree, takes on a double meaning here. In other words, we must trap M. Saulier at his own game, or not at all."

Michael subsided gloomily. "Maybe that crash was really an accident. Maybe we're barking up a blind alley for once—"

"Potin thinks differently," said Ames.

"And who the devil is Potin?"

"Our agent in Port-au-Prince." Ames glanced out the porthole of the plane again, with growing interest. "You see, *he* knew the steward aboard Ship Number 636. It seems the steward was a local guide of sorts—known currently as Larry Davis, and posing as a ticket-of-leave man. One of those international tramps who might be any age, race, or creed. A dozen passports in his pocket, all forged. Last month, he dropped out of sight completely; Potin is sure that he went straight to Ile Caiman for orders. Last week he

turned up in Miami—just as mysteriously, and under another alias, of course—in the commissary of the airline. Thank Heaven, all the employees are mugged and fingerprinted, in these trying times. Potin is reasonably sure that Larry Davis, and the one putative survivor of the crash, are identical. Unfortunately, that isn't enough to jail Saulier—even if Davis is a fugitive on Ile Caiman, at the moment."

"So you are calling on Saulier instead—is that it?"

Ames gestured toward the port-hole with a large flourish. "Why else would I charter an amphibian in Cuba this morning?"

III

LIKE all exquisites, Jean Saulier was a late riser; like most men who have lived long on the edge of doom, he was capable of wakening in a twinkling, in full possession of all his senses. This morning, he did not even stir resentfully in his white-shuttered room on Ile Caiman, when the roar of a Lockheed amphibian split the silence. In fact, he was at the lattice in time to see the plane bank above the roof of the warehouse at the foot of his hill, before it taxied away to a landing inside the breakwater, on the ocean side. Saulier's resentment evaporated painlessly, with full wakening, as his eyes moved on, across the fat green acres of his domain. His house stood at the brow of a great hill, with the sea on three sides. To the east, the land sloped into a series of cunningly terraced gardens, before it merged into the almost endless sweep of the cane-fields. Far beyond, the narrow channel that separated Ile Caiman from the mainland of Haiti gleamed in the early sunlight, a blue ribbon all but lost in the green phalanxes of the cane.

Saulier sighed, as he rang for his valet. *So this was American efficiency, with a vengeance. Well, he had been ready for Ames and Company for some time now. It would be an amusing overture to a busy day, to match wits with a man whose reputation had preceded him so graphically.* The Frenchman slid into a flowered-silk dressing robe, and crossed to his triple-mirrored chiffonier, to part his hair with

his usual exactitude. The thick black locks were scarcely touched with gray, even now; the candid brown eyes that smiled back at him from the mirror still sparkled with life. Incredible, that he should be nearing fifty now, with that profile—this lean athlete's figure. Saulier smiled again, as he turned to his valet. Yes, he could greet Christopher Ames this morning without makeup—and without subterfuge.

"Monsieur has risen early this morning."

"The plane wakened me, Henri. Is M. Dindon in the anteroom?"

"As always, Monsieur."

"Will you ask him to step in a moment?"

Saulier sat down to his breakfast tray with easy nonchalance; he did not even glance up, as his foreman entered the bedroom on deferential tiptoe. After all, Saulier had been a monarch of sorts for a long time, now; he had grown accustomed to hushed deference.

"Praise Heaven you are awake, Monsieur. You left no orders about that plane—"

"I did not expect them so soon, Dindon. Control yourself, please. We have nothing to fear from them now. In fact, I shall take pleasure in receiving them—in person."

The foreman concealed his surprise, none too expertly. If Saulier gave the effect of a *boulevardier* out of a dead France, Dindon was no less typical—from cane-boots to pirate scowl. A two-fisted bully of the old school, whose simian front masked a brain only a shade less keen than his master's.

"So you knew they were coming here, Monsieur?"

"You may drop the formality, Armand," said Saulier. "The walls are quite sound-proof."

Dindon sat down wheezily on the bed, and helped himself to a croissant from the breakfast tray. "Why aren't you afraid, Jean? *I* am."

"You and I have come a long way together, Armand. Have you ever seen me afraid—of anything?"

The foreman shrugged. "I was against that last job from the start. You know that—"

"Admit that it was managed perfectly, for all your doubts."

"Then why are they here—so soon?"

"Because they are desperate. I have investigated this Christopher Ames—thoroughly. He is Washington's trouble-shooter, *par excellence*. Believe me, Armand, he would not be calling here today if he had a shred of evidence against us." Saulier parted the blinds, to peer down cautiously at the harbor. "Shall I tell you more? Christopher Ames is a successful dramatist, in his own right. He began working for his government some years ago, under that convenient cloak. So far, he has not failed on a case. Too bad, that I must spoil his record here in Haiti—"

Dindon stood glowering behind his chief, field-glasses trained on the blue bay beyond the sweep of cane fields. "I can count *three* men aboard that flying-boat, now they've anchored at the channel buoy—"

"An inseparable trio," murmured Saulier. "The blond Hercules is a New York playboy named Michael Towne—or should I say, an ex-sportsman who now finds it more interesting to go hunting for his government? Officially, he's listed as Ames' financial backer on Broadway. The Indian is Towne's personal servant, and bodyguard." Saulier gave a purely Gallic shrug. "Money, brains, and aboriginal brawn. These are worthy antagonists, Armand."

"Give me the word," said Dindon. "I'll make sure that plane doesn't take off."

Saulier's smile was seraphic, now. "Give me an hour with Ames—and that plane will fly back to America, never to plague us again."

He rose on that, and went smoothly across the room to the tight-drawn blinds—parting them with one sure thrust, as he

stepped out to a wrought-iron balcony beyond. Heels clicked promptly in the flagged courtyard at his feet; shouted commands rang out, as the staff of the great house sprang to attention like well-oiled automatons. In a flash, there were twenty servants in the courtyard—twenty black faces, raised in dumb adoration, as the white king of Ile Caiman showed his austere person to the morning — twenty throats, rumbling with incoherent homage.

Odd, how alike their faces are, now I've tamed them to my purpose, thought Saulier. He clapped his hands sharply, stilling the dusky murmur in a twinkling. An overseer had already stepped forward—a swart, minor edition of Dindon, a bullwhip curling about his boots like a restless snake. Saulier barked a single order, in quick patois, before he turned on his heel, and re-entered the room.

"Ames will be brought ashore at once, Dindon. Never mind supervising—your assistants are already herding our pet cattle to their quarters."

"You'll let him see us—as we are?"

"Why not? If you understood poker, Armand, I'd tell you that this was a cold hand I'm dealing. But then, you don't understand poker; so you must assist me *without* understanding. Follow me, my friend; we are receiving our guest in the *grand salon.*"

THE *grand salon* was pure Empire, from the marble-topped writing desk to the imperial eagles screaming in frozen gold frames above the mantel. Christopher Ames made a prayer-book of his hands, as he lolled in the carved armchair, watching the light fall in hot bars at the window, a subtle accent to the Napoleonic coolness of the room. Saulier sat throned in the shadows, equally relaxed behind his unwavering smile. Only Dindon spoiled the picture, as he roamed restlessly from window to writing desk and back again. *A flick of an eyelash from Saulier, and those fat hairy fingers would jump at my throat, thought Ames cheerfully. I wonder why he's spared me, so far? Perhaps he's a little mad, like all geniuses. Perhaps it amuses him to play with me for awhile—here, in the charmed circle of his immunity.*

The playwright snapped out of his reverie with a start, and forced himself to concentrate on what Saulier was saying. "So you know all about me, Monsieur?" Christopher Ames' French was as pure as Saulier's, the accent quite as meticulous. After all, French is still the language of diplomacy—even the diplomacy of death.

"All that I need to know," murmured Saulier. "Yes, Mr. Ames, I was informed the moment you left Cuba. I know precisely what your orders are from Washington. You have come to Haiti, to investigate that unfortunate plane crash at Port-au-Prince. You think I'm responsible, Heaven knows why—"

"I *know* you're responsible, Doctor," said Ames evenly, watching Dindon bristle in the background.

Saulier restrained his aide with a gesture. "Why do you call me *doctor?*"

"Because you earned the title years ago —in tropical medicine. Because you deserved it—as a true healer—for many years thereafter. You see, *I* am well informed on *your* career, also. In fact, I spent hours going over your dossier, before I forced this interview upon you."

The Frenchman expelled his breath in a long sigh. "Forgive me for under-estimating you, Mr. Ames. Do I understand that you've come all this way to—how shall I put it?—complete my life story?"

"If you will excuse the impertinence."

"Let me send Dindon to the pier—invite your friends to join us."

"My associates will prefer to remain aboard, until my return."

"May I ring for champagne, none the less?"

"Isn't it a bit early in the day?"

"Not for my Pommerey '21." Saulier touched a bell at his elbow. "I'm sorry

that your friends are so—suspicious of me."

Ames smiled pleasantly. "Willy has orders to machine-gun this property from the air, if I'm not aboard in fifteen minutes."

"Then I have misjudged the motive of your visit, after all. I was *hoping* my life story was to appear—as the theme of a play. Perhaps as your *chef d'oeuvre,* Mr. Ames."

The dramatist considered, quite gravely. "Now that you mention it, there is a perfect tragic pattern in the career of Dr. Jean Saulier, late of the French Academy. The doctor who let his passion for research outrun his prudence. The practitioner who lost his license, and left Paris to escape arrest—"

Saulier did not budge. "So far, your information is common property. In all fairness, you should add that these charges were eventually dismissed—" He broke off, to gesture toward the door, as a Negro man-servant shuffled in with bowed head —a tray grasped tightly in two massive paws.

"The perfect moment for champagne."

The servant eased the cork from the magnum bottle in the ice-bucket. A supreme example of his race, the Negro's skin shone like polished mahogany—an oddly theatrical effect against the spotless mess-jacket and razor-creased ducks. Yet there was something inhuman about the man, something grossly mechanical—as if those great hands were operated by remote control, rather than a brain.

Ames managed to meet the Negro's eyes, as he poured out the wine—and shuddered faintly. There was no light there, no answering spark. Dead eyes that saw you, without understanding—the eyes of a shark in an aquarium.

"Va-t-en, chameau!" snapped Saulier. And then, as the Negro vanished, with effortless haste, "Shall we save time, and drink without toasts?"

Christopher Ames watched carefully, as the Frenchman lifted the bubbling wine to his lips. *No, he thought, this isn't the moment. He's savoring the game too much to count me out, at this early date.* He sipped his own wine slowly, savoring its cold, velvet perfection. How soon would Michael Towne zoom above his roof-top with spitting guns—if he had, for once, miscalculated his opponent?

Saulier voiced his unspoken thought, quite calmly. "Surely you don't think I would risk murdering you, Mr. Ames?"

"Thanks to this vintage, I have already transcended such fears."

"Splendid. Let me pour you another glass."

Ames accepted gratefully. "Strange, isn't it, that one country could produce such a perfect wine—and such an amoral scoundrel as yourself? Forgive my bad taste, while I am enjoying your hospitality—but, as I remarked, my time is limited."

"Why do you conclude that I'm a scoundrel? Surely that business in Paris—"

"Let me answer your question with another, Dr. Saulier. Just when did you find it more exciting to play with drugs, than to save lives?"

"Will you please explain?"

"That Paris imbroglio was mild enough," said Ames. "If I recall correctly, a certain titled lady came to you for a complexion cure—and you prescribed arsenic."

"A natural remedy."

"Yes, it's a fact that minute quantities of this poison will do wonders for the skin, providing the dosage is measured to a milligram. Did your hand slip purposely, Doctor? I suppose it *was* fascinating, to balance life against death, in your own private pharmacopœia. Like all members of your profession, you couldn't resist the urge to play both God and devil—"

"I think it is time you made your point, Mr. Ames."

"High time," said the dramatist. "Naturally, this Haitian background was ideal, when you decided to expand a bit. You had

ignorant victims by the dozen, to serve as guinea-pigs. Thanks to your large private fortune, you could buy this island and set up as a sugar planter—a convenient cloak for your research. To say nothing of the ancient island custom of employing zombies—"

"What was that word again?"

"I said *zombie,* Dr. Saulier."

"I detest the term. It reminds me of synthetic Hollywood horror—"

"Still, it is a perfect tag for the laborers I observed in your fields just now—for the black butler who opened our wine—"

"But *zombies,* Mr. Ames! Are you aware that Haiti classes them with the resurrected dead?"

"Precisely. As a scientist, you know that a zombie is a mere human whose brain has been deadened by drugs—in order that his body may be chained in slavery."

"I still await your point," said the Frenchman.

"Isn't it obvious, now? I'm accusing you of drugging your field-hands—herding them like cattle, with the aid of this gorilla at your elbow, and a few other picked bullies."

AMES lifted an imploring hand for silence, as Dindon moved ominously closer. "I also accuse you, Dr. Saulier, of using this human cattle for certain experiments which you conduct here, behind closed doors—"

The dramatist got to his feet again, as Dindon moved a step nearer; relaxed, when Saulier waved his foreman back. "Somewhere in this house is a laboratory, as complete as any in the Western World. That is your real kingdom, Doctor; this great plantation is merely a profitable front, which supplies you with black guinea-pigs. Thanks to the latitude of your experiments, you have developed a pharmacopœia beyond the dreams of the alchemists. Beautiful in its simplicity, but invariably deadly in its effect—"

The words, sank into a long silence. Ames glanced quickly at his wrist-watch—and waited, for the blow that did not fall. The Lockheed amphibian would be coming over in just four minutes, now, if he *had* misjudged Saulier. But the Frenchman only leaned forward eagerly, with a lupine smile.

"Continue, please."

"Naturally, these ghoulish works of yours would be no concern of Washington, if you had confined yourself to Haiti. But it was not enough for you to destroy men's brains; you began to destroy their lives, as well—to put your destruction on a business basis—"

"One moment, please—"

"Do you deny that you have perfected a poison that leaves no trace?"

"I do not deny that such a poison might exist."

"Will you admit that you've used that drug for wholesale murder—at bargain prices?"

"But really, Mr. Ames—"

"When did Larry Davis go on your payroll?"

"I do not recall the name."

"Larry Davis was very much in your employ—when he began work as steward, on an American airline operating from Miami and Cuba. Davis was following your orders, when he poisoned the two pilots on Ship 636 last Thursday—causing a crash at the mouth of La Gonave Bay."

"Indeed?"

"An accident that'll be certified as accidental, unless we can pin that steward down."

"That's always the rub, eh Mr. Ames?"

The dramatist leaned forward sharply. "One more accusation, and I'm done. I accuse you of sheltering Davis—somewhere on Ile Caiman. Will you deliver him into my custody, and take the consequences? Believe me, it would save us both time."

"But that is impossible, Mr. Ames. According to the papers from the mainland, Larry Davis jumped clear of that plane,

and drowned—apparently, a few seconds before the crash—"

"Unless he jumped with a parachute—and was picked up by one of your launches. Do you deny that?"

Saulier spoke softly, "No, Mr. Ames."

"Thank you for that much, at least."

"Will you finish your wine, and let me talk for awhile? First, let me admit that all you say is true. Surely there is no harm in that, with only my faithful Dindon as witness. Too bad, is it not, that you cannot prove a word of this?"

"Where is Davis now?"

"At the bottom of the Windward Passage, with an old anchor at his feet. Oh, you were quite accurate in your guessing. He *was* picked up by one of my launches—with Dindon aboard. He was also shot through the back—most efficiently—the moment he had finished his report. You see, Davis knew far too much of our *modus operandi*. After this final coup, it would have been quite unwise to let him live."

"Quite," echoed Ames. "In fact, I was afraid of that."

"Admit the job is now quite fool-proof, in spite of your clever reconstruction. Admit that it will be wise for you to return to Miami at once, empty-handed."

"Suppose I prefer to be stupid—and linger in Haiti?"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Ames—but your life will not be worth a *gourde*, if you are found in Haiti tomorrow."

SAULIER was already on his feet, bowing from the waist. Ames returned the bow with punctilio, as he turned toward the doorway. The Frenchman stopped him with his voice.

"Give Mr. Towne and his Seminole my regards—and advise him not to use machine-guns above my property. I've a gun-turret of sorts in my own roof. In fact, Mr. Ames, you'll find few small kingdoms defended half so well as mine—"

Once again, the Frenchman bowed. "*Bonjour, Monsieur, et bonne chance.*"

"*Bonjour M. le Docteur.*" And then, Christopher Ames paused for a fraction in the doorway. "Of course, it is I who should wish you *bonne chance*. You will need luck in the near future, Doctor. Tons of luck—now you have forced me to fight you with your own peculiar weapons."

Ames walked out on that, ignoring the foreman's sputter.

Saulier sat alone for a long while, until he heard the amphibian taxi down the bay—until the diminishing roar of the motors told him that the plane was boring south again, through the incandescent noon. *South, to Port-au-Prince. So Ames and Company had taken his dare, after all.*

Saulier's hand was shaking visibly, as he drew the ice-bucket nearer, to pop a cork from the second magnum. His voice was trembling, too, as he reached for the island phone, and began to shout his day's orders. Orders that had never been so late, in this small kingdom of the damned.

IV

IN a cane-brake on the mainland, the field-hands were laboring at the fag end of day—double rows of sweating ebony, tossing great sheaves from the damp earth to the waiting flatcars.

Armand Dindon swaggered insolently, as he bossed the loadings. Uncoiling his whip in an experimental flick, to forestall any symptom of lagging, Dindon was happy once more. After all, it had been a long time, now, since that nervous noon when he had returned from the bay to find his chief roaring drunk—and red-eyed as a cornered catamount.

Strange, how jumpy the old man had grown, since the visit of that *sacré Americain*. Dindon was quite sincere, in believing that Saulier was above such petty vices as remorse for the past—or fear in the present. And yet, the Chief had discharged his valet and bolted his shutters for the first time in years. Only last night, Dindon had found him in that crow's nest

on the roof-tree, drawing a bead on the new moon.

It was a picture to chuckle over now, in the bright sunlight. Perhaps the other overseers were right, when they gossiped in their quarters; perhaps they had all grown fat in the service of a madman.

Dindon banished the disloyal thought in a great roar—and snaked his bull-whip down the row of straining backs—rousing a concerted groan as obligato to his own rumble. Then he walked carefully along the machete-tailored lane, to check each face in that laboring file—pausing once to crash the butt of his persuader into a bullet skull, as the lips beneath curled in a snarl.

Rage was always a signal, to be reported at the laboratory; almost as bad as the gleam of an eye, the flash of a smile. Dindon had long since learned, from his master, that *thought* had no place in these work-beast brains. Thought must be slashed out with the whip, beaten into a coma, until the next feeding at the barracks. A ritual that Saulier was careful to superintend. A mere matter of extra drops from a ready vial, forestalling thought for some time.

Dindon swaggered on, with his mind at peace again—passing the little mulatto at the end of the line with one contemptuous glance. He failed to observe the man's head as it turned, ever so slightly, to make sure of his passing. The eyes that followed his progress now were far from glazed. The hand, raised in a signal, was quick as light— So was the flash of the steel, as the knife hurtled out of the cane-brake to the left—to pinion the foreman's shoulder on the wooden side of the last flat-car.

A man burst into the sunlight, to bear down upon the writhing overseer. A dark otter of a man, masked to the eyes—a second knife swung from a thong at his wrist.

The little mulatto had already ducked craftily from sight, as Willy Emathla pounced—ripping Dindon's shirt from his body, pinking the foreman's chest with surgical precision. Deep, deliberate slashes, not quite fatal—until Dindon's writhing body had pumped forth a savage red cross —the crooked voodoo cross of death, older than time.

The field hands stood in a row, to stare at the foreman's agony, long after Willy Emathla had vanished. Impervious to suffering now—with no whip to drive them —their faces were innocent of emotion—save a certain dumb relief at this interruption in their round of toil.

The little mulatto was one with that inchoate mass—staring as stolidly as the others, out of the same empty eyes. He did not stir, as the crash of running feet on the roadbed told him that Dindon's fellow-bullies were coming on the jump. Felix Potin had been trained in a hard school; he knew what the slightest flaw in his masquerade would mean.

But he made no effort to still the wild joy in his heart, while Dindon's minions eased him down—when they fell back to a man, round-eyed as they read the message of doom, slashed in red across that gorilla chest.

V

DR. JEAN SAULIER, formerly of the French Academy, stood immobile as a statue under the drop-light in his laboratory on Ile Caiman. He was measuring reagents in a Bunsen jar—an exact job requiring a steady hand, and precluding conscious thought for the moment. A true

scientist, Saulier was oblivious of externals when he worked. He did not even note the silken whisper as a window-curtain was put aside, in the outer dark. He did not see the copper mask in the gloom beyond his work-table—or feel the pitiless eyes that followed his slightest move. Moments of concentration were precious to Saulier now; only in this work-room could he shut out his growing fear, a brand-new item in his cosmos.

Sure-footed as a cat in the dark, Willy Emathla moved closer to the flame of the Bunsen burner; he crouched, quickly, as Saulier raised his eyes from the flame and mopped his fine, high-arched forehead. For a long time, the Indian rested comfortably on his haunches, in the ambush of a steel storage-case, watching the devil's dance of boiling liquid in the Bunsen jar, the long plume of steam, vanishing into the dark. At long last, he watched Saulier set the ruby-brown mixture aside to cool, before the doctor moved slowly to a table-drawer, to extract a hypodermic needle, and an ampule of morphia. Quietly he waited as the Frenchman bared his arm for the injection—thought better of it—and pocketed both needle and opiate, as he went slowly out, touching a switch at the door to plunge the room into darkness. Willy Emathla laughed, soundlessly, and moved forward, sure-footed as ever as his hand slid along the zinc surface of the work-table.

On the terrace outside, Jean Saulier breathed deeply of the fresh night air. He knew that that business with the hypodermic had been inexcusable—and almost involuntary. He knew also that he must sleep tonight, or face complete mental chaos in the morning. His hand dropped instinctively into his side-pocket, to caress the cold glass barrel of the syringe—withdrew as quickly, as though he had touched a tarantula in the dark. *Pray God that he could put that business behind him, once and for all. Pray God that he could sleep a dreamless sleep again, outside the tropical languor of morphia.* Jean Saulier smiled thinly in the dark, as he remembered that the damned are denied the solace of prayers.

Perhaps it would comfort him to visit Dindon in his quarters, to play God for awhile in his foreman's eyes. Armand had been up and about for some time now; the wounded shoulder had healed nicely, too. Of course, he would bear that ghastly death-sign on his chest, until his dying day. Saulier paused at the terrace rail, and raised his fist at the moon. *Death-signs, and dying. The same sterile potion, the slaves' broth he could have mixed blindfolded. Had that become his final raison d'etre? That, and the mad dreams that only morphia could banish, now?*

Saulier continued his pacing — as he forced himself to review the attack on Dindon in a rational manner. After all, the outrage was over a month old, now; it was also true that his overseers had been attacked before, and survived. What did it matter if Dindon's assailant was white, black—or red? What if Ames and Company *had* vanished into thin air a month ago, despite the best efforts of his agents in Port-au-Prince?

No, he would not visit Dindon tonight; it would be better to face his foreman in the morning, when his mind was clear. Saulier's hand dropped once again to his pocket—and the salvation of the waiting hypodermic. He paused deliberately in the dark, to tighten the skin of his forearm before shooting the injection home. Caressingly he rubbed the morphia into his bloodstream with the ball of a thumb, before he mounted the stairs to his bedroom—ignoring the crisp salutes of his aides in hall and anteroom. Was there mockery in their glances, now — perhaps even pity? Or was he beyond pity, now? Saulier could well afford to put such trivial conjecture behind him, as the tall doors of his bedroom sighed shut—as he stood in the penumbra of the night-light, smiling down at the deep sanctuary of his bed—

the great, brocaded four-poster where a king of France had slept two centuries ago.

UNLIKE most kings, Saulier had made his own bed for some time. Tonight, he bent drowsily to turn back the rich damask of the counterpane—and recoiled, with a scream of pure animal terror.

Patterned beneath the spread, from the four corners of the sheet, was a heraldic design in bloody chicken-feathers. The ancient voodoo pattern. The crooked cross of Mumbo-Jumbo, terrible as the first recorded curse.

The bodyguard had crashed in with Saulier's first bellow; but the king of Ile Caiman shouldered through them without a backward glance. Outside, a heavy oaken door gave to a stairway that spiraled upward, toward the faint sheen of moonlight. The Frenchman took the stairs with all the agility of an ageing chamois—and paused for breath only when he was inside his lookout on the roof-tree.

The place was a miracle of welded steel, a snug Martian's nest atop the world he had made. Saulier sank down gratefully on the swivel-seat, and nested the mounted Tommy-gun against one shoulder, as he raked the sky through telescopic sights. He had slept here before, since unreasoning fear had come to dwell with him. Now, for the first time in days, he knew the luxury of relaxation, as the morphia moved sweetly down his nerves.

And then, even this escape was shattered, as the sound of a plane's motors split the night sky—faint but distinct, the whine of a hornet's ghost.

Jean Saulier roused from his half-coma, to rake the sky with his sights a second time. He had heard that ghostly *whirr* before, in waking dreams; more than once, he had seen the black shadow of those wing-tips above his gardens. Tonight, the plane was almost too high to find—though he spotted it, for an instant, as it banked. Twenty thousand feet above Ile Caiman, a mere gnat on the face of the moon.

For a moment, his nerves found spurious release, as he raked the night with wild bursts from the Tommy-gun—to blast foolishly at the whining engine he could hear but not see. He continued firing until the last cartridge had chattered through the breech, until the shouts of his aides had subsided on the terrace below. Then, as the ghostly throb of motors died away, Jean Saulier slept at last. Quietly, as a child might sleep, with both arms embracing the stock of the Tommy-gun.

VI

HIGH on the shaly flanks of Morne du Loup, Christopher Ames sat on the lip of a sheer volcanic fault, with binoculars at his eyes. The bald-faced mountain towered a good mile above the Windward Passage. Seen from that distance, the outlines of Ile Caiman had all the maddening generality of a relief map spread out on an ocean background. And yet, Christopher Ames seemed quite content to study his objective from this distance. He even smiled a little, as he heard the rattle of gravel from the slope above. Michael Towne came gloomily over the crest to join him. A sun-bronzed giant now — in a palm-leaf hat and tattered singlet. A streamlined gladiator, itching for war.

"Sit down, Michael."

"Two months, by the clock," muttered Towne. "When do we go over and take him?"

"When he's ripe for the taking." The playwright had not yet lowered the binoculars. "Nothing could be more dramatic than the suspense down there, Michael. An earthly paradise, with hell seething beneath. A lost soul, who babbles in his sleep, and takes pot-shots at the moon—"

The ash-blond giant tossed a pebble at the void. "Sorry. *I* haven't felt in the least dramatic, since you started this cat-and-mouse game."

"I know it, Michael. Yours is the type that demands action, and sulks when action is delayed. Have patience—we're invading, soon."

"When?"

"Tonight—if Potin sends us the signal I'm waiting for."

"For seven weeks now, we've skulked on a jungle river with our plane. We've let Willy risk his life on that island—playing hide-and-seek with those overseers—haunting Saulier in the lab. Why couldn't *you* stay aboard the plane, if you enjoy waiting? Why couldn't I go over and join him?"

"Because you don't have Willy's knack of making himself invisible, Michael. Hasn't it released enough energy, flying over after dark?"

"I'd rather throw a few punches on the ground."

"Think back, Michael. Suppose we'd strafed our white king's palace that first day—as you were burning to do. We'd be behind bars now, in Port-au-Prince, trying to explain things to our Minister, while Saulier's lawyers called the next trick. Surely it was better to take to the jungle for awhile, as all good guerrillas should—to place our allies where they could plague him most—"

Ames smiled around his binoculars, and continued, softly. "You must beat the devil at his own game, Michael—raise demons to match his own. *His* trick dulls his victims' brains, to make them his slaves; *our* trick robs him of his sleep. His demon strikes terror to his subjects' hearts; our demon gives him back his voodoo, ten-fold—until he cracks."

"Suppose he doesn't *ever* crack?"

"He'll crack tonight, or die in one piece," said Ames, lowering the binoculars. Michael was already on his feet, staring down eagerly at the sea. Even without glasses, he could mark the smoke rising from the green mass of Ile Caiman.

"Burning waste, on the mill dump," said the dramatist. "Potin was to light three fires there, for our final signal. Yes, Michael, I shall fly you over, the moment it's dark. Shall I repeat your orders?"

"Why? I've had two whole months to memorize them."

THE plane climbed steadily, toward the waning moon—climbed to thirty thousand, an insolent, vibrating pin-point in the great void of the stratosphere. Ames took his eyes away from the altimeter, and turned to smile at Michael, intent as a coiled spring in the observer's seat.

"Ready for the final scene?"

"As ready as I'll ever be—"

"Don't miss your cue," said Ames, as he went into his dive.

Haiti rushed up to meet them in the moonlight—a dark blot on the sea, unreal as the shadow of the moon above. At fifteen thousand, Ames cut his power, and leveled, to go into a smooth barrel-roll. He could see Ile Caiman in the moonlight, now, as he opened his motors wide again, to plunge like a bullet gone berserk. At two thousand, he could note the outlines of the breakwater, the dark mass of the workers' sleeping sheds—the proud whiteness of the master's house, atop the hill beyond. At five hundred, as the amphibian leveled a second time, Ames spoke without turning, through the dying scream of wind.

"*Now,* Michael!"

The ash-blond giant somersaulted backwards into the night. There was no time to count, before he pulled the cord of his chute, no time to mark the landing place Ames had chosen for him with such precision. Michael Towne felt his chute billow, as the ground engulfed him, with deathly swiftness. He flexed his knees automatically, for the crash of the landing—thanking his stars that Willy Emathla had taught him the knack of complete relaxation, in moments like these.

He grounded in springy turf, with no sense of shock—rolling free of the chute to sit up groggily. He had come down in

a seaward-facing marsh, not far from the workers' quarters; to the west, the master's hill was a black blot against the stars. Michael Towne ran west, low to the ground, his eyes knifing the shadows. *The silk-cotton tree, in the eastern terrace.* He could already see the arabesque of branches ahead, as his feet rang on the flagstones. Ames' map-work had been thorough; Michael knew he could have found this rendezvous blindfolded, once he had established his orientation.

Strange, how he could almost hear the quiet. He had expected a quick tussle in the dark, the stab of gunfire, the hiss of a hate-driven machete. But there was nothing to disturb the moonlit repose. Only the steady beat of his flying feet on the flagstones; only the throb of Ames' motors, as he taxied the amphibian to a safe landing inside the breakwater. *Christopher Ames, creator of living drama—moving up in the dark to watch his circus from a grandstand seat.* Michael chuckled as he dove into the shelter of the silk-cotton tree—hardly startled, now, when a lithe brown hand fastened on his shoulder.

"Down, Monsieur," whispered Potin. "Dindon is watching, from the house."

"And the others?"

"We have accounted for the others long ago—"

"And Saulier himself?"

"Your Indian is with Saulier," said Potin.

"Then where in God's name is my war?"

"Over for an hour now, Monsieur. I have waited here that long for you—"

"Then why have you spared Dindon?"

Potin smiled in the dark. "For you alone, Monsieur." He glanced quickly down the hill, toward a slow-rising murmur from the workers' quarters. "There is not too much time—"

"Tell it your way," said Michael Towne.

Armand Dindon spun sharply away from the barred doorway, as a step sounded in the shadows of the hall.

The gun at his side spat flame, an automatic reflex after those taut hours of waiting. Silence answered the burst; a silence more terrible than the trump of doom. Armand Dindon stepped into the light with a roar—just as a great, dark snake lashed out from nowhere, coiling about his right wrist, snapping the gun to the floor.

Michael Towne came out of the shadows with both fists flailing, without waiting for Potin to coil the bull-whip. The foreman met his rush with all the cool insolence of a battering-ram—an insolence that changed in a flash, as he stopped a sledge-hammer right, flush on the jaw.

It was over, as quickly as that. Towne stared down regretfully at the inert mass that was Dindon now—plus a clean knockout. "So that's my reward, after two months of waiting. Where's Saulier?"

"In the lookout, Monsieur—on the roof-tree. Willy Emathla was waiting for him there, when he broke for cover."

But Michael was still staring down at the unconscious foreman. "So this poor fool thought he was *guarding* his boss—even now." He broke it in the middle, as a heavy oaken door swung open down the hall.

Jean Saulier stepped out coolly, and walked toward them with the light in his eyes. He walked easily, despite the hard persuasion of Willy's automatic.

"Stand back, Willy," said Michael. "I've some fast talking to do, before the real invasion starts. If M. Saulier will listen quietly—"

The Frenchman inclined, without speaking. Michael saw that his face was veal-pale in the light, the pupils contracted to mere pin-pricks. *Doped to the gills even now, he thought. But not too doped to follow me, if I can slap this over hard enough.*

"Ames is waiting now, in the bay. Will you waive extradition, and fly with us to Miami tonight, to stand trial? Or would you prefer to remain on Ile Caiman, and be butchered by your field-hands? Believe

me, Saulier, they'll take days to do that job, and enjoy every moment of it—"

The Frenchman shook his head helplessly, like a sleep-walker emerging from nightmare; but Michael rode over the interruption. "First, it was caffeine concentrate in your coffee—and the curacoa you're so fond of, with an after-dinner cigar. No wonder you couldn't sleep for weeks, Saulier. Of course, the real hero in our plot is Felix Potin, who stands beside me now. You understand, he has been on our government payroll, long before he worked his way into your field-gang. Naturally, it was simple for him to work hand-in-glove with Willy, when Willy stole your antidote from the lab—"

Saulier moved forward with a choked sob; once again, Michael cut him short. His voice trembled a little now, with the mounting conviction that his points were going home. "Oh yes, M. Saulier, your pet drug has been segregated long ago, and thoroughly analyzed in Washington. Obviously, you couldn't go on feeding it to those poor devils forever, without having dead labor on your hands. According to Willy's own observation—which Potin is prepared to second—you needled them with an antidote, each fortnight. Not too much, of course—*that* would have cured them on the spot; just enough, to keep the light flickering in their dim brains. Of course, Potin could cure as many as he chose, once Willy had stolen that Bunsen jar from your lab—"

Michael let the rest ride, as he held up a hand for silence. Outside, the darkness was alive with the slap of bare soles on the terrace—the hiss of a hundred indrawn breaths. As they listened, someone tried the knob of the barred entrance-door, and withdrew as softly.

"They're making their own dark sport of this, Saulier. First, they've murdered your overseers—all but Dindon; waiting their chance, throttling them in the dark. God knows why, they're still afraid of *you*—too afraid to rush the house, for awhile. Instead, they're waiting for you to show fear, waiting until they're drunk enough with freedom to put your fine gardens to the torch. And when you are smoked out at last—like a fat white rat—they'll wreak their own private revenge. A retribution you can picture much more vividly than I—"

A stone crashed through the blind at a French window, cutting Michael's peroration neatly. Saulier sprang back with a whimper, as the garden beyond sprang into hideous life. A place of wild torches, and shining eyeballs, a writhing *mélange* of naked black torsos. A machete whizzed in from the dark, splintering the fine rosewood curve of the stairway. Potin rushed forward, and replaced the blind, as the Frenchman cowered to his knees before Michael Towne.

The throaty murmur of voices died to a distant thunder.

"They are getting back their courage fast, Saulier. Still, they have not yet dared to surround the house. They don't know that Willy Emathla has hidden a canoe in the marsh beyond your gardens, that a plane is waiting inside the breakwater. You can still escape with us, Saulier, if you'll come on your own legs."

"Sacré nom de Dieu—sauve-moi!"

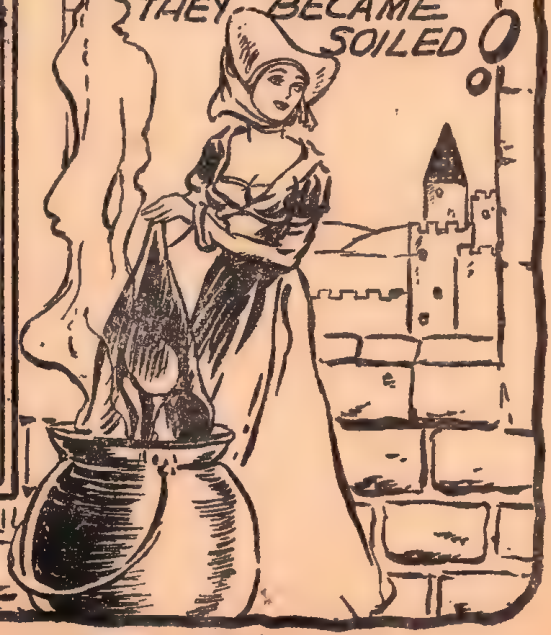
Michael tossed handcuffs to Willy Emathla, without comment, and swung away—as barren of any emotion, even pity, as he would ever be. Potin was already leading the way down the hallway to the *grand salon,* where the imperial eagles of Napoleon looked down from their frozen gold frames. A moment later, the patter of footsteps died away in darkness—the only sound to mark the abdication of the white king of Ile Caiman. A brooding silence grew in the room, as the proud golden eagles stared on into emptiness—a silence broken at last by the mounting roar of a Lockheed amphibian's motors. A sound that cued perfectly with the first crackle of flames in the woodwork, as fire licked in from the blazing gardens.

Curioddities By Weill

CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF THE **HIPPOPOTAMUS** DOES *NOT* *SWEAT* **BLOOD!** THEY DO SWEAT A STICKY RED FLUID THAT CLOTS AND LOOKS LIKE BLOOD— *BUT THERE ARE* **NO BLOOD CELLS IN IT!**

THE EGYPTIANS CALLED **IRON** BA-EN-PET, 'THE METAL FROM HEAVEN.' THEY BELIEVED THAT THE FIRMAMENT OF HEAVEN WAS OF IRON BECAUSE THE METEORS, THE ONLY THINGS WHICH DROPPED FROM THE HEAVENS, *WERE OF IRON!*

IN ENGLAND, BEFORE THE ERA OF LAUNDRIES, PEOPLE HAD THEIR CLOTHES **DYED** A **DARKER SHADE** *WHEN THEY BECAME SOILED*



WHERE ARE BARBERS FORBIDDEN TO EAT ONIONS DURING CERTAIN HOURS?

See Curioddities next time.

Good Neighbors

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

LIFELESS and drear the prairie joins the sky,
A treeless waste devoid of wealth or gain;
No beauty here to catch the settler's eye,
No promise, save of toil and sweat and pain.

And yet . . .

Some eye can see beyond the prospect drear,
Some hand can feel the life-pulse in the sod;
Some heart can find content in what is here,
Building Tomorrow on Today—and God.

IT IS an odd fact, to be borne in mind later on, that a long portion of the eastern boundary of Hardflint's farm was formed by a creek, a tributary of the Osage. In a primitive country as Kansas then was, no settler was going to erect fences unless necessary, so here the creek naturally served as boundary between Hardflint's acres and those beyond—a deserted farm just now in litigation, its buildings burned.

Some said, however, possibly with truth, that Hardflint had other reasons for leaving that portion of his farm unfenced.

Everybody knew he was an abolitionist.

Matthew Godden had heard a good deal about him. Now, at the day's close, he dismounted and walked his horse beside the brawny farmer, whom he had encountered repairing fence on his north line, near the highway. Godden eased the rifle on his shoulder; no one would ride into this part of Kansas unarmed, even if the troubles were over, in this summer of 1860.

"Supper, and the night, and maybe longer, *ja!*" exclaimed Hardflint. "You are my guest. My wife Minna will be glad, you bet! We have plenty room."

The brawny, bearded, fearless-eyed farmer, a man of fifty, was curious about his guest and questioned him frankly. Godden was curious about his host and said so, laughing.

"Nothing to hide, Mr. Hardflint. No, I've no interest in the gold rush, in trading, in land, in railroad building. My errand here is to try and secure some trace of a man known as Peter Lawson, who came west from Philadelphia eight years ago and was last heard of in these parts."

Hardflint gave the young man a sweeping inspection. He was pleasant but assured, hard of eye and mouth, firmly built, roughly dressed for the road.

"I've heard of him," he rejoined cautiously. "Is your business friendly?"

"It is," said Godden.

"All right. You stay awhile; maybe he'll come this way, *ja!* Pretty quick we see the farm, over that swell ahead. How do you like Kansas? Pretty tame, eh?"

"Maybe you think so," Godden replied significantly. "I don't mind toting this rifle, myself. Mr. Greeley was out here last year and says in his New York paper that everything is quiet, but it doesn't look that way to me."

Hardflint nodded understandingly, and became more at his ease. If his guest read Horace Greeley's paper, then he was against slavery and might be considered safe.

Kansas was distinctly unsafe. For the past few years, pending its erection from a territory into a state, it had been a dark and bloody ground for slave and free factions. Murder, robbery, even massacre, had gone unpunished; it had been a maelstrom of strife attracting outlaws and border ruffians wholesale. Many a man had vanished here without trace. Matthew Godden's errand was no uncommon one, but he was exceptional in that the man he sought was apparently still alive.

Statehood had relieved the stress. The discovery of gold and silver at Denver and elsewhere in the Rockies, still an unknown and distant land, had started a wild stream of emigration. Hordes from the East poured through this country, as they had in '49, to dream of gold; afoot and horseback, by stage and wagon, the flood of humanity streamed on, to fill up the vacant prairies as they passed, new settlements springing up everywhere.

Hardflint swung up his hand, not without pride, as they topped the rise and sighted the buildings ahead.

HOUSE, barn, corncribs, all were well and stoutly built, with half a dozen cottonwoods struggling for existence. Godden was astonished; this dwelling was not the usual cabin of the border, shiftless and pig-starred, but a substantial structure, fenced off to itself with flower beds in front, and a chicken house behind.

"I teamed those timbers clear from the Pottawatomie," announced Hardflint. "Got two cows now, and four head of oxen for plowing."

"You run the place all by yourself, do you?"

"*Ja;* four years we been here. Next spring my son will come and bring his family. He is in Illinois now, but it is better here. Oh, we have help at times, sure! Well, there is Minna. I show you where to turn in your horse, then I finish the chores and we talk. You have all the news, good! Pretty rare here to get news, I tell you."

Godden put up his horse, met the buxom Minna, a stalwart laughing woman, and found himself provided with a room and a real bed, not just a shuck mattress. There was water in plenty from the spring and he enjoyed the luxury of a shave and cleanup, before attacking a home-cooked meal such as he had not enjoyed since leaving home.

Everything about the place was exceptional. He had been told he would find it so, for Hardflint's was a farm well famed. This was not due to money, but to hard work and to the proper idea of what a home should be—something rarely encountered in the back-country. Hardflint readily admitted it, when after dinner he lighted up a huge pipe, pumped Godden for news, and talked about himself.

"German? Sure; our folks were German, but I am an American citizen," he said. "Lots of folks like us in this country west of the Mississippi, you bet! Some just over from the old country, too; all down through Missouri, down into Texas, you find plenty Germans. Like the ones in Pennsylvania, eh?"

"Where you sure get good dinners," added Godden. "Like yours here,"

"Some day, if the slave states ever make trouble," puffed Hardflint, "our people will fight hard for this country. They ran away from the German countries to get free, and here they are free, but others are not. So what? We do not like slavery, I tell you! Some people say there may be war one day; if it ever comes, you watch our German settlers, *ja!*"

"Careful," put in Minna, busy with her knitting. Her husband sniffed, and winked at Godden.

"Oh, he's all right! He reads Greeley's paper."

"Yes, I guess I'm abolitionist," said Godden, smiling. "But let me ask you about your name, Mr. Hardflint. I never struck any such name before—"

The farmer broke into a hearty laugh. "My folks were Hartstein in the old country, but we made it over into American—Hardflint. Not just the same meaning, but it sounded good so we took it."

Godden nodded at the big Sharps rifle hanging over the fireplace, inspected it, and they talked guns for a spell. The Sharps was loaded, and was kept loaded.

"I change the load now and then," said the farmer grimly. "The troubles are all over hereabouts, so they say; but maybe they ain't. Still, we got right good neighbors on three sides, real good neighbors. Fourth side, that belonged to a pro-slave feller who got run off a couple years ago. That's why we got no fence on that side along the crick."

"Fence?" repeated Godden, puzzled. "What's that got to do with it?"

Hardflint winked. "A lot, you bet! Some men are always hollering about their neighbors; if you ask me, there's a secret to it. Good fences—that's what makes good neighbors, *ja!* Stands to reason. Good fences, takes two to make, you and the other feller. Every time you see good fences, you can look for good neighbors."

"But you have none along the creek."

"Nope." Hardflint looked at him, eyes bright, dangerous, defiant. Then the massive face changed, warmed in a smile. Just the glimpse of something; gone now. But Godden thrilled to it. He remembered an old truth about the backwoods and border. No man, ever, is what he seems.

A PRICKLE ran up his spine. Then it was gone, like that glint in Hardflint's face.

He lay wondering, that night, alone in bed. He had touched something; a mystery of some kind, but no light one. Life and death, probably. Did it have something to do with slavery? Perhaps; hard to say. Slavery still existed hereabouts, at least nominally; and in a state whose western boundaries included the new golden city of Denver, anything was possible. Upon which sensible reflection Godden fell asleep.

Next morning he was given a new bit of education in the value of fences in Kansas.

Finding Hardflint gone to get his corn hoed, Godden pitched in and helped Minna with the chores. He was doing some cleaning-up in the barn when he saw two horsemen approaching the place. He went into the kitchen and told Minna, who darted into the main room and got down the Sharps rifle.

"You keep out o' sight," she exclaimed, "till we see who 'tis. Thank goodness, nobody can ride right up to the door, with them high fences about! In the old days a body was liable to be ketched, but not no more."

Rifle on arm, she strode forth to the gate of the fence that girded the house and barn. The two horsemen rode up with jovial greetings; evidently they were friends.

"Hi, Mis' Hardflint! Whar's Dutch?" called one. "And thar' ye be with the buffer gun ag'in! You'd better save it for tomorry night. Looks like—"

Minna broke in upon him, and thereafter Godden heard no more of the conversation until she called him out to introduce him.

He shook hands with the two men, who were both armed; they were friends of Hardflint from Fort Smith. Upon learning that he was trying to get some word of Peter Lawson, their first demand was to discover the reason. Godden laughed.

"Don't worry, gentlemen; nothing but some good news for him. He'll know, as soon as he hears my name."

"Must be pow'ful important news to fotch you all this-a-way," said one, dubiously.

"It is; but it's private. If you can tell me where to get in touch with him—"

"Stay sot," said one of the visitors, after an exchange of glances. "I expect we'uns might git some word to him. I ain't see Pete for a month o' Sundays, but I hear tell he's drivin' some cattle back from Salt Lake and mought be here any day. So stay sot."

"Thanks," said Godden. "No mystery about him, is there?"

"Nope," was the reply. "Not so long as Dutch and Minna vouch for you. Ain't no mystery 'bout him, pilgrim. Ain't too safe in these parts for him, that's all; he was considerable active in the Free State war, and they's a heap of pro-slave folks who don't love him none. A heap of old debts to be paid off, and John Brown's hanging ain't improved tempers none around here."

The two rode away affably, and Minna refused to discuss them. The recent hanging of John Brown, for his Harper's Ferry raid, had stirred Kansas deeply, for this had been his country. It had awakened old animosities and aroused dormant hatreds, and they were nothing to talk about. People who lived with their lives in their hands, did little talking.

However, Hardflint did plenty of talking this evening. All the travel was not heading westward, by a good deal, and he had during the day encountered a party camped up the creek that was heading eastward; a party whose pitiful story of hardship and suffering was all too common. The brawny Dutchman made no comment when told of the morning's visitors, but he did burst into voluble speech when Godden commented on the unbroken prairie horizon.

"*Ja!* You are like everybody else," he declaimed. "You run to find the gold diggings and get rich quick! They pour past here, hundreds in a day. Land speculators, traders, and hunters, railroad builders, and always gold seekers. All they see here is mud, dust, unturned sod; they call it terrible country and push on elsewhere."

Godden caught the idea, and with a wink at Minna prodded him on.

"Yes," he said, "I've heard plenty about these prairie lands. Six months of snow and six months of hell, some say. A terrible climate in winter and nothing but wind all summer. The soil won't grow any-

thing but buffalo-grass. There's no timber to build houses with, and the pig-pen is usually bigger than the house, as I've noticed myself."

Hardflint surveyed him suspiciously, caught the twinkle in his eye, and broke into a roar of laughter. Then he sobered.

"That's true, *ja;* but you can't get nothing without work. This country takes work, and look at it! No trees to clear off no stones and boulders to grub out. Plenty water. Not a swamp anywhere. Every inch of soil tillable, limestone and sandstone for building, and maple or cottonwood trees grow large enough for sawing in five years from seed."

"But what about crops?" demanded Godden.

The farmer almost exploded. "I tell you, one man alone can plant, cultivate and gather fifty acres in a season. Corn gives an average of forty to sixty bushel to the acre, *ja!* Wheat, fifteen to forty bushel. A hundred bushel of corn to the acre sometimes. Hay is a natural crop, the grass growing five to ten feet high. Hungarian and such grasses produce three or four tons to the acre."

"You've talked a lot about fences," said Godden, shifting his ground, "but these fences of yours aren't what I'd call fences. They're more like hedges. I know you've no timber for fence rails, but—"

Hardflint wagged a forefinger in the air.

"Don't you make no mistake!" he declared. "What's the best kind of fence? What we use, *ja!* Osage orange, that's what! Settlers in a new country are poor, but they can afford Osage orange. It makes the best kind of fencing and in two or three years it's like a stone wall. Sure, maybe the country ain't pretty. Seven years ago there were only a hundred white settlers in all Kansas, but look at it now! There's no country anywhere like this, and these fools pass it up to go chasing rainbows."

"But it took work," put in Minna placidly. "Maybe that's why we like it."

"*Ja!* What's worth having is worth working for, you bet!" her husband agreed. "I tell you this prairie land is rich, and some day it will be great and lovely. It won't be like we see it now, with little mud-chinked, dirty cabins and people struggling for life. It'll be all orchards, grand farms, houses a thousand times better than this, and there won't be a foot of it untilled or going begging!"

Godden laughed. "Don't let your enthusiasm run away with you, Hardflint. Why, man there aren't people enough in the whole United States to fill up these prairies!"

"Plenty more coming from Germany and other places. Plenty people want land."

Godden shook his head.

"I doubt it. I suppose you'll say next that we won't have any black slaves left!"

Hardflint pawed his bushy beard, a fiery glint in his eye.

"Won't be if I can help it," he barked harshly. "Like old John Brown used to say. The Almighty has given no man rights over another! The slave states are rich in the spoils of selfishness, and therefore poor, and doomed to a more bitter poverty yet. This is the country of freedom, this wide prairie land! These plains of ours, now so empty, will be rich and wealthy in freedom; they were made for free men who work with their own hands, not with slave labor."

His voice rose in booming power.

"*Ja!* I tell you laws don't matter, or customs or mob rule—there is a law made by heaven as old as the world, that will endure forever—"

"August!" interrupted Minna. "You have not fed those pigs. Must I do it?"

Hardflint, cut short, blinked at her. He had forgotten some of his duties; now he laid aside his pipe, heaved himself out of his chair, and departed. Minna made a gesture to Matthew Godden.

"He talks too much, now you are here," she said placidly.

"Well, he's right about it," Godden rejoined.

"Maybe. But too much talk is bad. And it is not fenced down by the crick."

"What's that got to do with it?"

She shot him a glance over her knitting.

"Good fences make good neighbors," she said. "Where there is no fence, maybe will come trouble. That is good land across the crick but it is owned by pro-slave people. Bad. Bad luck till it is fenced."

More than this, she would not say. Again Godden had the feeling that he had touched something sinister and ominous, and again the meaning eluded him.

Next morning, after the chores were done and Hardflint had gone to his corn hoeing, Godden was drawing the old load from his rifle and cleaning the gun, when Minna vouchsafed a word of advice that brought matters to a showdown.

"Might as well leave my gun unloaded," Godden observed. She looked up and shook her head.

"Better not," she said curtly. "Always bad luck."

"Those two men who were here said something about tonight," he rejoined. "You're not expecting anything to happen, are you?"

Her face startled him. Usually pleasant, it was suddenly drawn and hard and lined.

"Maybe," she said. "We got some friends coming by. Maybe August will have to take the wagon on a trip."

"A trip? Where?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, east towards the Iowa line," she said with assumed lightness. He nodded at her.

"All right. Then I'll load the gun fresh and go along if he goes."

"Don't be a fool!" she spat out abruptly. "You stay in bed. You know what it means. You can't fool me. I won't have you risk your neck, you hear me?"

SHE left him abruptly. He loaded the rifle and laid it aside, soberly. Yes, he could guess; he was no fool. He had heard plenty of talk since coming into this country. He had long since been dimly aware of what was in the air here; still, he was not certain.

When Hardflint came striding in toward noon and asked his help in running the wagon out of its niche in the barn, he got another pointer or two. The wagon was put outside and left, the harness ready; yet the sky was massing with clouds, wind blowing them up from the north and west. Back in the house at the dinner table, Hardflint gave his wife a look.

"Seen two men acrost the crick this morning," he said.

She started. "No! Who were they?"

"Dunno. Ridin' horses, looking over the crick-bed."

Agitation seized Minna. "Strangers? That's bad! You should fence the crick!"

"I know it," he rejoined moodily. "But can't be done now. Maybe, after tonight."

Matthew Godden spoke up abruptly.

"Count me in," he said calmly. "I'm not blind. Maybe I can repay your hospitality this way. I can drive the team."

The farmer surveyed him grimly. "Not my team, you can't. They need exercise; it'll take all my muscle to hold 'em in. Want to walk over to the crick after dinner?"

"Sure," accepted Godden, with a smile.

After the meal they walked over; it was a good half-mile from the house to the unfenced portion, the burned buildings of the abandoned farm in sight beyond. Along the creek were a few saplings and thick sumach bushes. The water was only twenty feet across, all low banks on this side and high on the other.

Hardflint pointed to the higher opposite bank and indicated a spot where it had caved in, leaving a gentle slope up.

"That's the place," he said. "Got to take the wagon acrost there, *ja!* And those two men were looking it over. That is maybe bad."

"Why do you have to go over, here?" asked Godden.

"Because it is a short cut. It saves many miles around. On down the crick a wagon can't get acrost; here it is over and on the way before horsemen can catch up. Unless they're waiting over yonder! That's what I don't like. So you know what it's all about, do you?"

Godden chuckled. "I guess we understand each other by this time. You're on the underground railroad, eh? Others fetch the slaves here, you load 'em in the wagon and get 'em on across the Iowa line, where they're free. Eh?"

"*Ja;* it's a good work," said the farmer. "But I'm worried about those two men. Too late to back out now. There is no law in this, just the rifle."

Shoot to kill, in other words.

"If you think they've dropped on to your system, pick some other spot. Go around."

"No," said Hardflint, trouble and anxiety in his eyes. Suddenly he jumped. "Look! The same two men—look yonder! On foot now, coming here! And we got no rifles!"

His alarm was needless. Two men had appeared coming through the opposite fields toward the creek; one waved an arm in greeting and they came to the cut-bank and halted.

"Howdy," called one. "You wouldn't be Dutch Hardflint, would you?"

"*Ja,*" replied the farmer.

"We're from the land survey office tryin' to measure up over here. Lines were run from a stake somewheres along the crick. Can't find it. Can you locate it for us?"

"*Ja.* Sure. I point it out," said Hardflint. "A hundred yards downstream. I show you."

He did so, received profuse thanks, and rejoined Godden. Huge relief was in his mien, and as they walked away he rumbled with laughter.

"Bad conscience, you see? Nothing to worry about after all! You tell Minna. I'll get some work done. Maybe it won't rain till tonight, when we'll need it most."

The sky remained heavily ominous, however.

The good Minna, throwing off all pretense now that the secret was out, tried her best to keep Godden from having any share in the business; but he laughed at her warnings. He had always wanted to have a hand in the far-famed underground railroad, and this was his chance, especially if he could be of any use. With the suspicion anent the two men across the creek now laid to rest, there was little likelihood of danger.

"More's the pity!" he thought. "I'd like to see a bit of Kansas action!"

Supper was almost a gay meal, what with secrecy gone and anxiety at ease. There was a rising, howling wind outside; so much the better, said Hardflint. A good storm would cover wagon-tracks. When would they come? Oh, not before midnight at least. Time to get four hours of good sleep anyway, while Minna stood watch.

However, it seemed to Godden that he had barely hit the pillow when Hardflint was shaking him awake, tallow-dip in hand.

"Nigh on to eleven, and we got visitors," he said. "Shake a leg!"

GODDEN slid into his clothes, caught up his rifle and joined the others in the main room, which was pitch dark. Outside a voice was hailing. Hardflint went to the door and answered, and across the gusty wind came reply.

"It's me, Pete Lawson! I can't get your pesky gate open. Come lend a hand."

Hardflint was unbarring the door, when Godden fell upon him and checked the action.

"Stop, stop! Something wrong here—don't go out!" he exclaimed. "That's not Peter Lawson out there."

"How d'you know?" demanded the farmer.

"Because that's not his voice. Peter

Lawson's my father and I ought to know it—"

An impatient hail from outside bade them hurry and open up. In upon it broke a flurry of alarm, a shout; then a rifleshot burst forth, followed by the sharper discharges of a revolver and a storm of hoofbeats, oaths and yells that died away in the darkness.

"Ahoy there, August!" lifted a shout. "This is Tom Mullins. Open up!"

"All right, all right!" replied Hardflint, and opened the door upon darkness. Two dark figures stood there. He greeted them with recognition, and they spoke in excited alarm.

"Looked like a trap, Dutch," said one. "That wasn't Lawson; we left him with the wagon. Them fellers fired on us when we come up, then skedaddled. Lawson says to tell Matthew Godden he'll be along and must see him."

"Thanks," said Godden, giving his name and shaking hands in the darkness. Followed a brief, staccato consultation eloquent of peril.

Something had gone wrong. A dozen slaves were in the wagon on the way to freedom, but pursuit was afoot. This bloodless battle at Hardflint's gate tokened bloodier conflict to come unless quick action were taken; Lawson and the escaping slaves would be along in half an hour. Aside from Mullins and his friend, here, no help could be expected.

"Godden, did you say you're Pete Lawson's son?" demanded Mullins. "Speak quick."

It was no time to hold back. Godden plunged; already he sensed the trap closing in upon them all.

"Yes; he left Philadelphia years ago, accused of crime, and took the name of Lawson. He was innocent. I've come to find him; he can come back to us now. The real criminal has been found and convicted."

A chorus of hearty oaths and admiring exclamation broke forth. Evidently Peter Lawson had friends here. Through it all leaped Godden's voice.

"No time to waste talking! Hardflint, we're in a hole. Those men across the creek were not land surveyors. They're posted over there now, probably with others, to catch us. That was a blind to throw us off the scent while they got the lay of the land and got posted. Now which wagon must go on with the slaves?"

"Mine, of course, with the fresh horses," growled Hardflint.

"All right; thanks to the blowy night, we can fool 'em. Get your wagon hitched up right now, and ready. When the other comes along, transfer the slaves to yours. Somebody will have to drive it across the creek. Any ambuscade there will fall on it. Then the rest of us ride through with the fresh team and the slaves."

A grand idea—only—

"Who's going to drive the empty wagon?" asked somebody. "Whoever does, is a goner for sure! They'll open up on him. This time they're out for business."

"All right. I'll drive it," exclaimed Godden. He spoke rapidly, eagerly, explaining what he planned. "There's a chance anyhow. If somebody will swap me a revolver for my rifle, I'll take the gamble."

No sooner said than agreed. Fists pounded him on the back, a heavy revolver was shoved under his waistband, and they all went out to get the team harnessed up.

The wind was moaning high; rain coming soon, predicted Hardflint. Mullins went back to meet Lawson and the slaves. Hardflint had his hands full, trying to control the team. Everything had to be done without a light, in pitch blackness.

This time, the abolitionists had been caught napping, obviously. They had thought their plans airtight and had neglected bringing along any armed escort, so sure were they of success. But somebody had talked. The pro-slavery forces had learned of Godden's desire to find Peter

Lawson and had laid a trap to catch Hardflint and all of them at one crack.

There had been threats that any more slave-running would mean sudden death to those responsible. Only Godden's intuition, and realization that the voice outside was not that of his father, had spoiled the attempt to shoot down Hardflint—this, and the unexpected appearance of Mullins and his companion.

By the time some straw and buffalo robes had been thrown into the wagon, and the team reduced to quivering immobility, a hoot-owl's cry lifted across the night. Mullins was coming Hardflint answered it. Hooves sounded, wheels rattled: a voice rang out in demand.

"Where's Godden? Matt, are you there?"

"Here, Dad," he cried joyfully and gripped hands with the tall, bearded man who came to earth. But there was no time to talk now.

"Pile out, pile out!" Mullins roared at the blacks. "Into the other wagon, quick!"

Moaning, whimpering, terrorized, the dozen escaped slaves obeyed, while Godden exchanged a few words with the father he had not seen for eight years, telling his news. Then Mullins was demanding him.

"Godden? Where are you? Get aboard and get off! Know the place to cross the crick, do you?"

"Sure. Is the wagon-box moved?"

"Everything as you want it. Here's the whip and reins—"

Peter Lawson intervened suddenly, demanding to know what was up; Mullins had told him nothing of the plan. Godden struck in hastily.

"Never mind, Dad. Don't interfere; see you later! Good luck, Dutch!"

The whip cracked. The tired team leaped in the harness, and feeling an empty wagon now, struck out at a good clip. The other team and wagon, the saddled horses, the shadowy figures of the men, merged into the blackness.

To handle this weary team was not so easy, at first, since Godden had to stand at the front end of the wagon. The box had been moved clear to the back; for the present he chose to stand in front where the team could be better managed. The empty wagon rattled loudly as it bumped on its way to the creek crossing, and this was as he wanted.

A spot of rain splashed his hand, and called up sudden sharp regret in his heart. If only it had come sooner! If only the start could have been delayed half an hour! But that could not be. Long before the rain came down, the whole affair would be ended for well or ill.

"But I've got the darkness for ally," he thought, with pounding heart, as he neared the creek-bottom. "And if they don't get me at the first volley, I'll have a good chance to get away safe—there it is! Can't miss that crossing, now. Another two minutes, and I'll know whether I was right or wrong—maybe there's no one here at all—"

To find the crossing in the dark was not easy; the horses found it before he did and then he was aware of the gap in the sumach bushes. They were splashing across, now. Another raindrop wet his cheek. He backed and backed in the wagon-bed and reached the box at the back end; the reins were barely long enough to reach.

The heavy whip swung and cracked, swiftly. The team quickened pace, took the bank ahead at a plunging spurt. The lash stung them anew. They were up the bank, the wagon was up; another whip-crack and they broke into a run. Then Godden dropped the whip, clung to the reins and crouched back at the wagon-box, hanging on for dear life. Either there was nothing to fear or—

Shouts leaped up; commands, orders to halt. A buffalo-gun blazed away with a wild roar that sent the horses leaping in startled panic. Rifles and revolvers sent a storm of balls at the wagon—aimed, nat-

urally, at the supposed wagon-box and drivers. Bullets splintered and riddled the sideboards. One of the horses, hit, screamed and plunged more wildly.

Alongside the wagon came a thundering rider, yelling and shooting at the horses ahead. Godden thrust forward the heavy revolver and fired point-blank. The rider screamed and went crashing. At the same instant, Godden got his foot over the tail-board and jumped.

He fell heavily, but, prepared for the shock, did not lose his weapon. Hoofbeats and rattling wagon swept past and on. He rolled over and came to his feet, in delirious joy. The ruse had succeeded! The wagon had drawn them all on and away—

THEN he heard the voice of the rider he had shot.

It lifted from somewhere to one side, calling for help; other voices made response. Other riders were coming back to help the hurt man. Godden considered running for it; he might make the creek, and by this time Hardflint and the other wagon ought to be across. As he turned, something came plunging at him—a horseman, then another. Oats and shouts rose all around. A horse barged into him and knocked him sprawling.

"Here's one of 'em, boys!" rose the alarm-yell. "Git the damned abolitionist! Don't let him reach the crick!"

He was cut off. They were everywhere, it seemed. As he gained his feet and then crouched in panic, a horseman loomed above him; the animal shied and leaped sideways with a terrified squeal. A rifle vomited flame, the bullet screaming close. His revolver leaped in his hand; he fired again and again, and flung himself frantically aside as other weapons made response, the shots splitting the night.

But they had him placed. Those bullets were whining close. Unexpectedly he collided with a dark shape, a dismounted man who grappled him. He lashed out frantically with the heavy revolver and was free. A weapon exploded almost in his face, and he gave himself up for lost.

Then, to his horror, a jagged fury lightning blazed across the sky.

That wild flare illumined him full; it gave him a glimpse of horses and men on every side. There must have been a dozen or more in all. He made a frenzied dive for safety, hitting the ground, rolling over and over in the ensuing blackness, losing his weapon as he did so. It was the end, and he knew it.

But, even before he found his feet, came blessed intervention.

A blast of wind, a terrific howl that drowned yells and oaths and shots, and the clouds opened. That wild first blast actually knocked Godden flat; as he struggled up, the deluge hit like a solid wave of water.

Instantly, every lesser thing was wiped out. Godden made a desperate effort to get clear of the enemy; blinded and gasping, he fought his way through the blackness.

The scream of wind, the sweeping downpour of water, brought him to his senses. He turned his back and ran for it, before the storm. He came down into a slight hollow, an old buffalo-wallow, and halted there, panting and dripping, soaked to the skin.

How long he waited in this partial shelter, he could not tell. Gradually the hollow filled with water, which rose about his feet. After a time the downpour lessened; across the sky ventured another rip-flare of lightning. The glare revealed only empty prairie around, and Godden caught his breath in relief.

He climbed out of the water, figuring swiftly. The storm was coming from the north and west; therefore, if he headed full into it, he must sooner or later get back to the creek. He struck out, but heading into it was not so easy. The lull passed, and down came howling blasts of wind and rain that battled him to a standstill.

And then, in the next lull, a voice:

"Matt!" it lifted afar. "Matt! Sing out, Matt!"

With a gasp, he shouted response; he knew that voice. It came closer, and he shouted anew. Then, as though the very elements were now fighting for him, lightning flared again and he saw a lone bearded horseman, and was seen.

Two minutes later, he was clasping hands again with his father.

"Thank God, Matt, thank God!" cried the older man. "When I heard about your crazy plan I came to find you—hadn't much hope—bad hurt?"

"Not hurt at all, I guess. Did Hardflint get off?"

"Sure. He's gone with the wagon. We'll catch him up, most like. I'm off out of this, heading back home with you. No horse? Here, climb up behind me; we'll go double."

Godden obeyed. Presently, his arms about his father's brawny figure, they were jogging ahead through rain and storm that washed away every vestige of the struggling hatreds behind. Ahead, across the wide unbroken prairie which some day would be so rich and splendid a country.

Ahead, into the peaceful ordered life of the future, where no slavery existed, and where men were ruled by the eternal truth that the Almighty had given no man rights over another.

A truth that can only be preserved inviolate by those willing to fight for it, and by good neighbors who keep their fences in repair.

KNOW the Blind River country?

It's north of Lake Huron and it's wild, plumb wild.

One of its wilder spirits tangled with the police — he was a good guy, but reckless — and took to the bush.

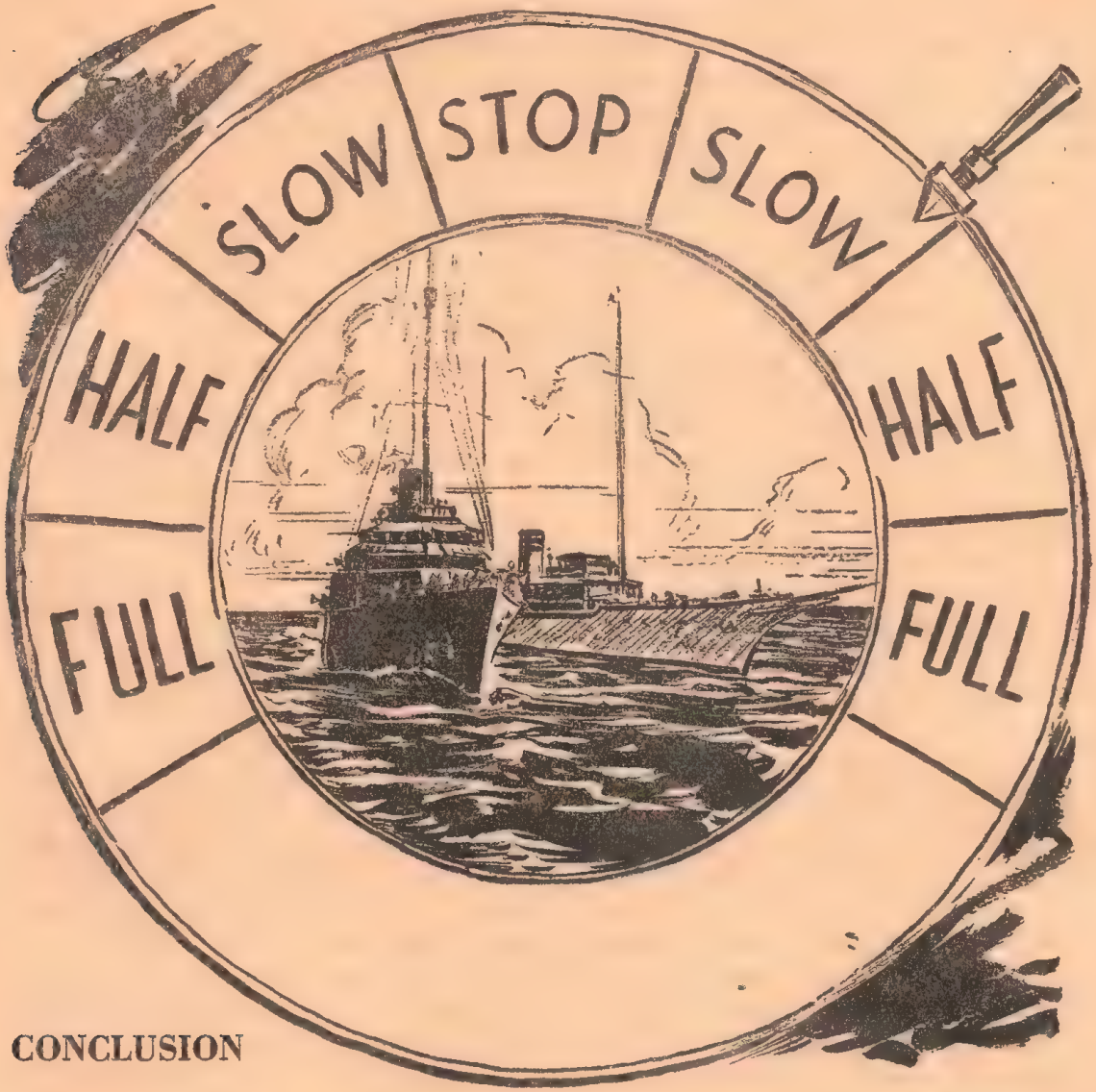
But something else stirred through that bush country. . . . . the word was war.

NEW RIVERS CALLING

A stirring serial of today starts in our next issue . . . . . by

James B. Hendryx

When Rescue Came, the Rescuers Thought There Was Mutiny Aboard the "Privateer"!



CONCLUSION

DEATH CHARTER

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

XVII

I TRIED to get Gay Holly out of that hurricane of noise, gun-smoke and savagery. I reached for her. She bent swiftly, scooped up the gun that Mueller had just dropped. I lunged for that gun, somehow missed it. I grabbed her by the arm, gave her a yank toward the door.

Gratz was attempting to level his Lueger at Hymie Bloch. I slammed my left fist full into his face and felt his nose give under my knuckles. He slammed back against the bulkhead, his face a horrid thing to see.

I looked back and saw Hymie Bloch and Lieutenant Mueller die. They died while Mueller was still on his feet, while Hymie was still clinging to him like a

monkey to a tree. I think Hymie's body must have been dead for some seconds past, but even his soul died now. As the Nazi, still screaming, began to fall, Hymie let his breath out in a long sigh and then toppled away from him. Mueller's scream faded in a bubbling, choking, cough. Hymie hit the deck first, on his back and shoulders. The German fell across him. They moved a little, flattening out in the way dead men do. And that was all I saw because Hellmuth and Karth were bursting in through the blackout curtains and I was hauling Gay out of that death-trap, dragging her through all that noise and smoke out into God's own sweet starlight.

We found ourselves on the boat deck, dodging behind ventilator cowlings, lifeboats and, finally, the purring stack, while bullets hummed past us like lethal mosquitos carrying with them the kiss of death.

Several black figures loomed ahead of us. Instinctively I ducked behind the stack, hauling Gay behind me into its protection. Her slim, hard body slammed up against mine. I slid my arm around her and captured the gun she had picked up on the chartroom floor. Its comforting bulk felt good in my hand. Even one gun, against all those possessed by the Nazis, was something to be grateful for.

With my arm still around Gay's young body, I peered aft at the oncoming figures, my violence-drugged mind finding it hard to realize that anyone coming from the after end of the boat were my friends —or that I had any friends at all. But my enemies, the Nazis, were all up on the bridge deck forward.

I stepped out from behind the stack.

"Wait, you men!" I shouted. "Take cover, quick!"

But from the bridge behind me came the malignant chatter of the machine-gun. One of the oncoming figures stumbled, fell to his hands and knees, then picked himself up. They all—even the one who had stumbled, vanished behind lifeboats, ventilators and the engine room fiddley.

I waited my chance. Then, still towing Gay along behind me, I made a break around the stack and ducked into the blackness aft of a lifeboat.

"Hands up!" said a gritty voice.

And a dark figure loomed up before me, moonlight bouncing off the bright shaft of a long knife which was poised just above my right shoulder.

"Bosun!" I cried, sharply. "It's Terry Ames!"

A sharp hiss of relief escaped his tight lips. "You spoke just in time, Captain," he said in a vibrant voice. "Anybody ever tell you that the most dangerous man is a scared one? In another wink of an eyelid I'd have split your heart into two pieces."

Johnny's breathless voice came out of the gloom. "Terry, who's that with you?"

I can't tell you how my spirits soared. I hadn't known until this very instant how much I had counted on my older brother. All my life—or at least until the last four years—he had always been standing by, always ready when I needed him in a pinch. And this very afternoon I had almost lost faith in him—had until now thought him sleeping off a drunk at this murderous moment—but here he was, just as he used to be, right at the head of the parade!

"Good guy, Johnny," I murmured thankfully. "It's Gay here with me."

"Thank God!" he said. "I couldn't imagine where she was. What are you standing like that for, kid—all bent over?"

In the dark protection of the stack I tried to straighten up, but the burned places across my stomach sent a million blades of pain knifing into me. I realized my uniform blouse was still open. Hastily I gathered it together and buttoned it.

"Johnny," I said, in sudden anxiety, "your voice sounds kind of funny. What's the matter with you?"

"It's the life I lead," he said wryly.

I'm not in too good shape for all the helling around I'm doing tonight. Listen, Terry, the crew came aft as soon as those Nazi rats killed Shot-gun. Or a few minutes later, anyway. The bosun says all the watertight doors forward of the engine room are dogged down tight."

"I saw to it myself," said the bosun's quiet voice out of the blackness.

"What's going on up there?" Johnny asked, tautly.

"Plenty," I grunted. "Hymie Bloch and Lieutenant Mueller are both dead. Hacked and shot each other all to little bits. But the other three will be on the warpath now. Stay under cover and out of their way."

"You're telling me," said Johnny, a downward slur in his voice.

HE MOVED around beside Gay, whose soft, warm hand was still in mine. Johnny stood very close to her, his shoulder pressed against hers. After awhile I found I was not holding her hand any more.

"What'll we do now, Captain Terry?" the bosun asked.

I tried to think swiftly, but it was tough going. My head had been beaten so many times since dawn that it felt all fuzzy inside. And my entire body seemed to be on fire with pain. The pain started at the muscles covering my stomach and spread to the very tips of my fingers and toes. But there was work to be done.

"We have just one gun," I said heavily. "They can hold the bridge, because they have a clear field of fire along both decks. But—with luck—we can stop them from coming aft. They can't get into the engine room—or aft of it—on account of the dogged watertight doors. If we can prevent them from coming aft along this boat deck, or along the port and starboard sides of the main deck, we've got all the ship except the bridge and the officers' quarters and the bow and fo'c'stle." I turned swiftly to the bosun and handed him Mueller's Lueger automatic.

"Take this," I snapped. "I don't know how many bullets are in its magazine, but that's all you'll have, so don't shoot until you're sure you're hitting something. Take two or three men—if they have knives—"

"They all have knives," said the bosun calmly.

"Spot them behind lifeboats and ventilators here on this deck," I directed. "See that nobody comes aft. But keep out of sight. That machine-gun can ruin you all in one blast."

In the darkness the bosun nodded quietly, accepted the gun and then turned away.

"Come on," I said to Gay and Johnny.

I moved swiftly down the ladder which Gratz had used after murdering Pete Damon, the wireless operator. It was a relief to have something definite to do. On the main deck some of the crew were still hurrying out of the main saloon, having made their way aft below decks. I stopped them.

"Got knives?" I asked.

They had. Behind them was black Handy, the chef, with a cleaver in one hand, a carving knife in the other.

"Four of you go forward inside," I directed. "Don't show yourselves on deck unless you want to commit suicide. But take positions just inside the open doors of the companionways leading from the cabins to the deck. If anyone goes by you—coming aft—give them the knives, and plenty. Snappy, now."

Four of the crew vanished into the blackness of the deck house. Gavin and one seaman were left and, in the stern, Gay and Johnny, who had moved to the settee at the taffrail and were sitting down there.

Footsteps came pounding through the darkness of the main saloon. I crouched. But when the figure emerged into the half-light of the after deck, I saw it was Tom Malloy, the quartermaster, who had abandoned the wheel when Gratz and Muel-

ler had taken me into the torture chamber, the chartroom.

"Captain," he panted, "up forward the men grabbed that passenger, Mr. Weymouth. He was trying to sneak up on the bridge. What'll we do with him?"

"Bring him back here," I snarled.

I turned to look at Johnny, irritated that he should be sitting there, aside from all this and taking no part in these decisions.

"Wouldn't do you any harm to get down to the engine room, Johnny," I said. "There are things to do down there. Take a bottle if you want."

"Okay," he sighed.

Tiredly he pushed himself to his feet. He zigzagged a trifle as he moved into the deckhouse and vanished in the blackness. He must have found another bottle already, I thought dismally, and taken a few shots after waking up. Well, I hadn't counted much on him, anyway.

From the direction of the bridge came two quick shots. I found myself praying that the Nazis hadn't added one more victim to the list of four they had already slaughtered.

"Gavin," I said, "go below, and then come up through all the cabins on this deck. Light the ship up. Every porthole, every window, light them all."

"And the decks, too, Captain?" he asked.

"No. Not the decks. The lights would blind us as we look up toward the bridge —and besides, we'd be easy meat for them up there if they are good shots."

He went into the deck house and instantly the main saloon became a blaze of light. It was warm, cozy, in there, the way it used to be when Johnny and I, and my mother and father, had cruised from Maine to Trinidad and Paramaribo, never once dreaming that one day this would be a charnel ship, where men would die screaming and blood would seep into the scuppers.

I turned back toward Gay, who was sitting, small, and alone, and brave, at the taffrail.

"Searle Weymouth," I said, "was choosing up sides. He chose the gang on the bridge."

"In his whole life," she said evenly, "whenever Searle has had a choice to make, he has guessed wrong. That's why he's here now. He was on top of the heap once, in pictures, but he thought they couldn't make pictures without him, and he walked off the set until they would pay him more money. So now he's making quickies."

I stared at her, astonished that she could think of the picture business at a time like this. Was she dumb, I wondered, or did she have complete faith in us? I didn't know, and there was no time to figure it out.

"Why are you lighting up?" she asked quietly.

"There are American patrol vessels in these waters," I told her. "They may see us like this and wonder why a ship is steaming along all lighted up like an excursion boat."

"I hope they do," she said wistfully, "and before we get too close to the place we are going."

I stared at her a moment. "Thanks for reminding me," I said gratefully.

I moved forward a dozen feet to the emergency steering wheel and reached for the engine-room telegraph stand beside it. I yanked the handle back and forth, and brought it to rest on the word "Stop." The answering jangle from the engine room was sweet music to my ears. The throbbing of the deck under my feet died to nothing as the propeller shaft ceased revolving in its bearings. The yacht suddenly seemed very, very, quiet, although I had been conscious of no noise since those revolver shots from the bridge.

But now there was noise again. A scuffling of feet. Out of the deck house door came Searle Weymouth and Tom Malloy, the latter with one hand on the

collar of the actor's coat, the other grasping the seat of his pants as he propelled Weymouth ahead of him at a half-run. Searle Weymouth, cursing wildly, put his feet together and tried to plant them solidly on the deck, but Tom Malloy merely pushed the harder and skidded the actor straight up to me. When he released his hold and stepped away, Weymouth staggered and nearly fell.

"What right have you—" he started, wildly.

"Shut up," I snarled at him. "So you were going over to the enemy, a Quisling, eh?"

He tried to gather to himself some small measure of dignity. But very carefully he avoided meeting Gay's contemptuous gaze.

"I was not going over to the enemy," he said haughtily. "But we were captured. We were prisoners of war. They have all but one of the guns, and they have the bridge. Otto Gratz told me this afternoon that there is another airplane on the raider and that if we do not appear at the rendezvous on time they will simply catapult the other plane and find us."

It was hard to keep my hands off the man. And I could see that Tom Malloy was simply dying to give him a going-over.

"So what?" I asked, fighting to keep my temper down. "So you picked the winner and decided to play along with him?"

He puffed out his cheeks and gestured importantly. "I had my public to consider," he began, "and—"

"Cut!" said Gay clearly. "You haven't any public. Until we made this cruise I often wondered why. Now I know. Even without technicolor, yellow shows up on the screen."

"Gay," he said in a begging voice, "you wrong me. I just saw no object in getting killed in a brawl which we stood no chance of winning."

"Searle," Gay said evenly, "when I was just an extra, you were a star, and I looked up to you. I was flattered when you deigned to look at me. When I grew up to be your leading woman, I thought I had reached the top, even though I was only making two hundred a week. When Hymie made me a star, and signed you to support me, I thought there had been a mistake—"

"There was," Weymouth cut in eagerly. "It was a mistake to cast me subordinate to—"

"Wait, Searle," Gay cut in. "For top billing in a ten thousand dollar quickie you'd sell us all out. For safety for yourself you'd sit in the laps of those Nazis up there on the bridge and let all the rest of us be murdered. For—"

"In times like these," Searle Weymouth broke in, "it's every man for himself."

"Searle," said Gay, in a clear, bitter voice, "if we manage to get out of this there's just one thing—don't ever go back to Hollywood. If you do, don't ever pass the corner of Hollywood and Vine. They will spit at you."

Searle Weymouth stood looking at her, his eyes widening, the color fading from his handsome face. Now he no longer looked young. I realized with a shock that he was almost middle-aged.

"What'll I do with him, Captain Terry?" Malloy asked. "Mind if I smack him around a little?"

"Don't put your hands on him," I commanded. "He isn't worth locking up. But pass the word up to the crew. If they see him making his way toward the bridge, don't wait to argue with him or bring him back here. Pick him up and throw him overboard."

Weymouth, his ego deflated like a pricked bubble, moved back to the settee at the taffrail and collapsed upon it. I turned away from him with relief.

"Captain," said Tom Malloy in a troubled voice, "someone's been hurted bad."

"Who?" I demanded sharply.

"I don't know. But there's a line of blood drops on the carpet of the main sa-

loon, slanting from the door, here, forward across to the port-side passageway. Some—" He looked down at the deck and his blue eyes expanded. "Lookit, Captain!" he exclaimed, pointing downward.

I followed the line of his extended finger. From the settee forward to the door of the main saloon was a trail of small, dark, gobbets of blood. I caught my breath and tried to remember who had been sitting there, It did not take me long.

I was no hunter, no tracker of hot spoor. I didn't have to be. At a dead run I made for the deck house. There was the tell-tale track, leading obliquely across the plum-colored carpet of the main saloon to the passageway on the port side.

I heard footsteps pounding along behind me. Without slowing down I looked back over my shoulder. It was Gay Holly, running as fast as I. So she remembered, too, did she? I didn't wait for her. I raced forward along the passageway until I came to the open door in the steel bulkhead which gave entrance to the engine room. I stepped over the coaming, ducked my head and entered the strangely silent compartment.

That was the first thing that hit me, the silence. Oh, it wasn't really silent in that hot, oil-smelling compartment. The auxiliaries were humming away, but it was the first time I could remember having been in the engine room at sea when the main engine was shut down. The helper was at the after end of the quiet Diesel, morosely adjusting some gadget below the injector. He looked intently at me as I hurried past, but said nothing at all.

I noticed, hurrying forward along the steel plates, that the protecting shield below the fiddley had been hoisted even closer against the opening, and that the forward door—the door leading to the crews' quarters, was both closed and dogged tight against its rubber gaskets. I noticed, too, that the driblets of blood made a clear trail forward beneath my hurrying feet.

Clyde Gray was at his standing desk, his elbow on the slanting surface, looking down at Johnny, who sat in the bentwood armchair beside the desk, Johnny was bending forward, his elbows on his knees, and on his face was a pallor I had never seen before, even when he had been on a two- or three-day binge.

As I came to a stop before him, he lifted his colorless face and smiled apologetically.

"Terry," he said, still smiling, "I've got a bellyache."

XVIII

SILENTLY I looked at the steel deck beneath his chair. There was a large, dark pool of blood there, shiny from the unshaded electrics overhead.

"What happened, Bud?" I asked, reverting to the name I had used when I had been very young indeed.

"Up there on the boat deck," he said, still bending forward with his weight on his elbows, "when you and Gay came helling back from the chartroom. Remember, some of us were coming forward to see what was happening? Somebody cut loose with a machine-gun. I stopped one. It knocked me down, but I got up all right. I hardly felt it."

I remembered, all right. I remembered one of the dark figures dropping to his hands and knees, then picking himself up.

There was a gasp behind me. "Johnny!" Gay cried.

She slid in front of me. Deftly she opened Johnny's starched white blouse. My heart nearly choked me as I looked at the singlet beneath. There was a tiny hole there, but only a drop or two of blood showed. With exquisite care Gay pulled up the woven shirt, exposing Johnny's hard-muscled stomach. There, very low on the right side—just above the belt—was a very small puncture, blue around the edges. It was not bleeding at all. I closed my eyes for an instant, and moved

around behind him. Instantly I knew why there was no blood in front. It was all in back.

Johnny looked at the small puncture with interest. "It doesn't hurt much," he said, his tone vaguely surprised. "It just makes me feel tired."

Gay looked at me. I shook my head. Gently she pulled his shirt down, drew his white blouse together and straightened up. I had never realized anyone could become as pale as she, but I realized now why Hymie Bloch had said she had the makings of a really great actress. She even managed to smile convincingly as she met Johnny's dazed eyes.

"Why don't you lie down for a little while until you feel stronger?" she asked without the smallest tremor in her voice.

I glanced at Clyde. There were blue-black rings beneath his eyes and he was biting his lower lip. His gaze met mine for an instant. Then he turned away with a brusque gesture and made some pencilled notations on his rough engine room log.

"Not now, Gay," said Johnny, choosing his words with care. "I've got to stay here with the engines."

"Clyde's here with the engines, Johnny," I said gently.

"You go on topside, Chief," said Clyde, raggedly. "There's nothing you can do down here. Besides, it's my watch."

Johnny brought his eyes up to me. "How long are you going to keep the engine rung down, Terry?" he asked.

"I don't know, Bud," I said, straining to keep my voice on a level keel. "But what difference does it make? Clyde has started the engine before this."

"Too many times," Johnny said ruefully. "Funny, I should turn out like this."

"Look, Johnny," Gay begged, "let's go on deck. It's cooler there, and the sky is full of stars, and the chairs are comfortable. You can rest there until you feel better."

"The Nazis are there, too," said Johnny, decision coming into his tone. "When Terry goes in to finish them off, I want to be there."

"I wish we were underway!" Clyde burst out in an exasperated voice. "I hate it like this. We aren't doing anything!"

I knew what he meant, all right. As a matter of fact, we *weren't* doing anything. Getting Johnny to a doctor, for instance. But the nearest doctor was hours and hours steaming away—and we couldn't even steer the yacht to head toward him.

My brain suddenly clicked into gear.

"Clyde!" I said, excitedly, and pointed upward toward the deck beams on the port side. Then I swung my extended finger toward the ceiling on the starboard side.

As his eyes followed mine he understood. There, now idle in its blocks, was the stainless steel steering cable which ran from the wheel at the bridge to the steering engine just over the rudder at the stern.

"Unshackle that cable," I commanded, "or if there's no shackle in the engine room here, cut it with a hacksaw. Up on the bridge, then, they can spin the wheel all they want, and it won't do any good. We'll get under way and steer the ship from the emergency wheel on the afterdeck!"

With obvious relief at being able to take action of some kind Clyde reached for his tool rack.

"Nice thinking, Terry," said Johnny, smiling in a way that made my throat swell so I could hardly breathe. "I always said you had all the brains—and the guts, too—in the Ames family."

Gay was standing beside him, young and straight and slender. Even under the harsh impact of the unshaded light she was incredibly beautiful, especially looking down at Johnny with that pitying expression on her face. Johnny tried hard to get up, but didn't quite make it.

"Sorry," he grunted, "but I guess you two will have to give me a lift."

Clyde did not look at him as Gay and I eased Johnny to his feet.

"Mind if I lean on you a little, Gay?" Johnny asked.

"All you like, Johnny," she said, softly.

He put his arm around her strong, proud shoulder and they moved slowly toward the door. I glanced down at the desk—and did not look down again. How much blood did a body hold? By accident I let my eyes turn toward the back of his once-white uniform blouse. It was bright scarlet.

"Captain!" Clyde called in a ragged tone.

Gay and Johnny turned aft in the passageway. I walked over to Clyde.

"What in hell's the matter with you?" he exploded. "Can't you do anything for him? You didn't even try to do anything!"

I put my hand on his shoulder. "It would just hurt him, Clyde," I said, very gently. "Isn't it better just to let him take it easy?"

He stared at me, his face working convulsively. Then he whipped around and climbed a stepladder his helper had already placed beneath a shackle in the steering cable.

I turned slowly and made for the door. I had taken only two or three steps when the buzzer sounded loudly from the intercommunicating telephone. I was nearer to the instrument than Clyde.

"Engine room," I said, the receiver at my ear.

"This is Otto Gratz," came a hateful whisper. "Start that engine immediately."

"Come down and start it yourself, you goose-stepping rat!" I snarled into the transmitter.

"Oh, so it's Captain Ames," he murmured. "How does that swastika feel we burned into you?"

"That was your big mistake, Gratz," I retorted. "That's when you slipped at the top of the hill and came sliding back again, like your troops in the ice before Moscow and Leningrad. If it hadn't been for your fun with that cigarette, you might have had a chance to explain to your Fuehrer how you lost the maps. Now he'll have to guess, for you won't see Berlin again, Gratz. You've seen it for the last time."

His laugh was a horrible thing to hear. "Talk, Captain, talk. Then start your engine. For if you don't, a plane from the *Frankfurt* will find us at daybreak and I shall personally see to it that not one person from this vessel will ever see the full light of day." He chuckled again. "My mistake, Captain," he added. "I shall see to it that Gay witnesses many another sunrise. I'm sure she will do much to lift my spirits and, later, the spirits of the entire crew of the *Frankfurt,* on the long voyage back to Wilhelmshaven."

I hoped that my hate for him was reaching along the wire and burning him where it touched him, as his cigarette had burned me—that it would scar him indelibly, as my own stomach was now scarred by the crooked cross of the Nazis.

"Listen, rat," I snarled, "I'm going to start the engine in a few minutes, and when I do, will *you* be surprised! My suggestion to you is that you jump overboard immediately after."

And I slammed down the receiver upon its hook. My eyes were filled with a pink haze of fury as I blundered toward the door. I tripped on the coaming and almost fell flat on my face. I fetched up against the opposite bulkhead, shook myself and made my way aft along the passageway, following a thin red trail which told me all too surely the way Johnny and Gay had gone.

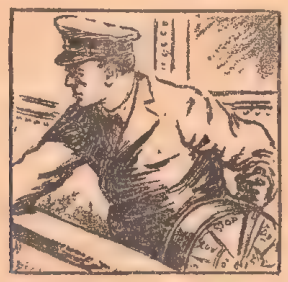
XIX

IT LOOKED so peaceful on the afterdeck! Gay and Searle Weymouth were sitting in two of the big wicker chairs when I emerged from the deck house.

Johnny was resting — apparently wholly comfortable—on the long settee at the taffrail. Tom Malloy, in his neat white uniform, was standing a little aside, waiting for orders.

Hesitating for a moment in the doorway, I looked at them and wondered if I weren't coming out of some feverish nightmare of battle, murder and sudden death. Here was the *Privateer* floating quietly on a moonlit summer sea, behind me an opulent room whose softly-shaded lights glowed warmly on furnishings I had known—lived with—for years. It had been our home, Johnny's home and mine, during the happiest time of our lives and it was almost impossible for me yet to adjust my mind to the horrors which had already happened. Looking at Johnny, now, lying where I had seen him take naps for years; never had he appeared more comfortable, more relaxed, than at this moment.

But the false calm was suddenly ripped into shreds by a quick, staccato burst from the machine-gun forward. I heard slugs clang against the steel deck-plates overhead, heard them whine as they ricocheted off into the darkness astern. My heart almost stopped beating as I waited to hear a scream, but there was no other sound from above.



I walked to the emergency steering wheel, got behind it and reached for the engine-room telegraph. I swung the handle and brought it to rest on, "Half-Speed Ahead." There was instant acknowledgement from Clyde and at the sound of those jangling bells the entire ship seemed to stop and listen. Except for the gentle murmur of the sea against her hull there was not a sound until a distant throbbing noise came from the bowels of the vessel and the deck began to vibrate under my feet. Swiftly I spun the wheel, my eyes fixed upon the binnacle as the card swung in the compass bowl.

"I'll take her, sir," said Tom Malloy, his blue eyes aglow. "What course, sir?"

He took the wheel and I closed my eyes, trying to remember the chart and our position on it when I had last seen it—just before they had taken me into the torture chamber of the chartroom. Long Island, Crooked Island, Samana, Cat, San Salvador, these I pictured behind us and tried to figure out the distance and compass course to each. San Salvador was probably nearest—being the outermost island of the entire group. But could I hit it by guesswork? It was only a dozen miles long and five or six wide, and surrounded by dangerous coral reefs. The only settlement, I remembered, was on Cockburn Town on the west side, but despite the fact that the population of the entire cay was only five or six hundred—practically all Negroes — there might be a doctor there. There was only one thing to do—to try it.

"Steer 260 degrees," I said, guessing at it, "and keep right on the lubber line. We'll have to take a chance we can see the Dixon Hill Lighthouse over the port or starboard rails."

The *Privateer* was still swinging in a great half-circle. Another fusillade of shots came from the bridge, followed instantly by a high-pitched scream from somewhere forward on the boat deck. I glanced at Gay. She had clapped both hands over her ears and was sitting there with her eyes closed. Searle Weymouth's face had crumpled. His mouth sagged loosely and his gaze darted this way and that, as if he were searching for some spot on this violence-raddled vessel where he might be safe. Johnny was no longer lying down. He had worked himself to a sitting

position and was listening intently to that continuing scream.

I spun around, grabbed the handle of the engine-room telegraph and rang up "Full Speed Ahead."

The screaming ceased. There were two more shots, then silence.

"I'll be back in a moment, Johnny," I said. "I've got to see what's going on up there."

"Wait, Terry," Johnny called. "I want to go, too."

"You sit there, Bud," I commanded him. "I won't be long."

I hurried forward to the port side ladder, mounted it to the boat deck.

"Who's that?" came a warning whisper.

"The captain," I said hastily as a dark figure loomed up beside me.

It was one of the seamen and his knife was already drawn back to strike. He peered at me through the moonlight and I could see the tension running out of his body.

"Glad you came up, Captain," he said in a relieved way. "Things are in a hell of a mess. They sent me aft to get you and I was just about to come down there."

"Why? What's wrong?"

"We got no guns at all now and those Nazis are giving us hell," he said.

"Where is the gun I gave the bosun?" I demanded, conscious of a sudden sinking of the heart.

"Captain," said the seaman gravely, "those Nazis started to come aft along the starboard side of the officers' quarters and they simply shot hell out of the bosun. A burst of machine-gun bullets hit him and he never knew what happened to him. And we couldn't find his gun."

"Who screamed just now?"

"Baker, one of the sailors. He's dead, too. Captain, what can we do without guns? They come slinking back in the shadow of the lifeboats and you jump at them and they shoot you before you can stick a knife into 'em. Them guys know how to fight and they've gone nuts, seems-like, ever since we turned around."

I didn't wait for more. I moved carefully forward—but not very far. Before I reached the big black bulk of the funnel I could see that my crew had retreated to well aft of the amidships section. They were crouching helplessly behind whatever shelter they could find, hoping against hope that one of the Nazis would come far enough aft so they could gang him. From the shadow forward of the funnel a knife-stab of flame lanced the darkness and a bullet whipped viciously past me, its breath stirring the air beside my cheek.

"Get down, Captain, for God's sake!" called an imploring voice from the darkness of the yonder lifeboat.

But I was already down, thankful that it had been a single shot from a pistol which had searched for me instead of a quick burst from a machine-gun.

Someone crawled up to me and startled me with his whisper. I spun around, and reached for his throat before I recognized Gavin, the quartermaster.

"We're in a spot, Captain," he said. "There's one guy inching his way down the port side, and another down the starboard. The guy with the machine-gun seems to get first on one side, then on the other, but we never know which side he's on. If we could just find the bosun's gun we could take a chance of rushing them, hoping the machine-gunner would be on the other side at that moment, but—"

"Don't do that," I said, trying to keep the discouragement out of my voice.

I could see, now, their tactics. Little by little they were driving our men back until—and in only twenty or thirty feet more—they would be past the widest part of the vessel, which was just forward of amidships. Having reached that point, they could command the afterdeck and at their leisure shoot down everybody back there on the deck below. They would be

able to lean out across the scuppers on this deck, get their heads and shoulders below the deck level and have a perfect view of the quartermaster at the wheel, and of Johnny and Gay and Searle Weymouth. In perfect safety, then, because theirs were the only guns aboard, they could pick us off like sitting ducks.

"Did you look carefully for the gun I gave the bosun?" I asked desperately.

"On our hands and knees we looked for it until those Germans driv' us back," said Gavin, earnestly. "And now they're past the place where he fell, so we can't look any more."

Even as he spoke the machine-gun chattered into life from a spot just behind Lifeboat No. 2. The man up there fired short, economical bursts, swinging his gun back and forth like a garden hose. I heard one of those slugs smack into somebody—it's a sound you never forget. From behind the engine room fiddley came a belly-deep grunt. Somebody's feet drummed frantically on the deck for a moment, then fell silent.

I scrambled to my hands and knees, my pulses hammering with hatred. How many of these men was I going to lose? Every one? And then Johnny and Gay—and finally myself? I took perhaps two raging steps forward when a cry from below brought me to a full stop.

"Terry!" came Gay's desperate voice. "Terry!"

I spun around and raced for the ladder. A gun spoke and two bullets whacked past me but the note of urgency in Gay's voice drove me on. I went down the ladder two steps at a time.

Gay was standing at the foot, her white face a clear, sharp oval against the outer darkness.

"Oh, Terry," she cried, "Johnny says he's going to clean this ship of those Germans. He says he's going to take them from the bow. I couldn't stop him and Searle wouldn't try!"

"Where *is* Johnny?" I snapped.

"He went forward along the passageway," she said, "and he looked so awful, Terry! He had to help himself along with his hands on the wall!"

I felt as if someone had kicked me in the stomach. For Johnny, bare-handed and already bleeding to death, to try to get upon the bridge deck from the bow—and then to attempt to take those Nazis from the rear was as futile a thing as a man ever imagined.

I sprinted into the deck house and forward along the passageway. In the engine room only Clyde's helper was there. He was standing near the throttle, a look of complete discouragement on his freckled face.

"Where's Clyde?" I called above the deep-voiced murmur of the engine.

He jerked his thumb toward the watertight door. "He got into an argument with Mr. Johnny, sir," he said. "Mr. Johnny made him open up that door to let him through. I didn't hear what they said, but Clyde grabs a pry-bar and follows him. He told me to dog down the door and I did."

Frantically I whirled the handles of the dogs. It seemed to take forever. I was still working on the top ones when Gay's slim young body crowded beside me and her strong hands began to loosen the dogs at the bottom edge.

"Go back on deck!" I yelled at her.

But her hands kept right on working and she made no answer. There wasn't time to argue with her. My ears were stretched for the sound of the shots which would blast away Johnny's life—and probably Clyde's too. There were four or five drops of blood at my feet—Johnny's mark. Why hadn't Clyde stopped him? He could have just by throwing his arms around him.

At last I had the door free. I put my weight against it and charged into the deserted crews' quarters. I heard Gay coming along behind me.

"Go back, damn you!" I shouted over

my shoulder. "Do you want to get yourself killed? Do you want to spoil everything?"

I didn't bother to see whether she obeyed or not. I wheeled hard right and scrambled up the steel ladder of the fo'c'stle hatch. In another moment I was standing alone on the deck, looking up at the silence of the bridge. No sound there at all. My eyes were becoming accustomed to the moonlight. Where were Johnny and Clyde?

I looked down at the steel deck plates. There, a short distance away, was a dark spot. And just beyond, another. So Johnny had veered off to port. Running lightly to make no noise, I headed for the foot of the bridge ladder on the port side.

A burst of gunfire from the boat deck made my heart leap into my throat. But it wasn't from the bridge above; it sounded as if it came from amidships, near the stack.

I crept quietly up the bridge ladder, found myself in the remembered darkness of the wheelhouse. Neither Clyde nor Johnny were there. I tiptoed across to the door which gave upon the long expanse of boat deck. There were no lights in the officers' cabins. The Nazis had blacked-out all the lights they could reach.

I stepped out of the door. And at that instant, so swiftly that I could neither move nor speak, two hands reached out of the shadows and closed hard on my throat.

XX

"JOHNNY!" came Gay's frantic whisper. "Johnny, it's Terry!"

The hands fell away. I dragged in a deep lungful of air.

"Johnny," I whispered, "get the hell out of here, and take Gay with you."

"Shut up!" came Clyde's murmured warning. "Want us all to get shot? Those rats are amidships—two of them hiding behind the stack. Lady, will you please go below and stop bothering us?"

"You two stay here," I commanded Gay and Johnny, who was leaning against the bulkhead. "Come on, Clyde, maybe we have a chance."

"Go on," said Johnny. "I'll—I'll do—as I damn please. What—what have I to lose?"

This was no time for a debate. The chances are we'd all be shot in the next few minutes or seconds, anyway—whether we were up here or down on the afterdeck.

My rubber-soled shoes made no sound as I hugged the shadow of the officers' cabins and began to ease aft. Clyde, his pry bar hanging loosely in his right hand, was so close to me that I could feel his sleeve brushing against mine. All my attention was focused on the black-and-silver expanse of the boat deck as I tried to make out of skulking figures of the Germans. But the black shadow of the funnel blotted out the two Clyde had seen behind it, and I didn't want to move until I had spotted the third—especially if the third had the machine-gun. But the thought that perhaps the third was Otto Gratz spurred me on.

From behind a lifeboat on the port side a streak of flame lanced through the darkness as somebody fired a single shot toward the stern of the ship. So there was the third man—and he had a Lueger, not the machine-gun!

I sucked in my breath and, running silently, sped across the open deck, heading straight for the shadow of the funnel. It seemed to take hours, that sprint across thirty or forty feet and my entire being was tensed against the expected shock of a bullet slamming into me from that oblong spot of blackness ahead.

"Achtung!" rasped a hoarse whisper out of that shadow, and my heart bounded. There was *my* man! Otto Gratz!

I swerved slightly and spread my arms wide. I put even more speed into my onward rush. It seemed to me in my blazing hatred for Otto Ganss that everything I

wanted in this world, all I asked of life before I died, was to get my hands on him and to tear him apart like an old rag doll.

Blindly, as I entered that pool of blackness, I slammed headlong into somebody so hard that we both crashed heavily to the deck. For a second we groped around there like two blind animals lusting for the kill. Gratz found me first while I was still groping a little to his left. His hand touched my face, slid like a snake around my neck and jerked me toward him. In another instant I felt something hard and round jabbing into my stomach.

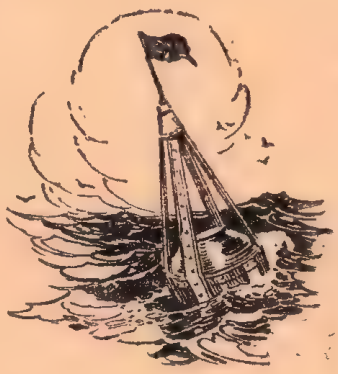
But my right arm was free. I swept it down, brought it across Gratz' wrist and knocked it away with such frantic force that even in the sudden hell of violence which broke around us I could hear the weapon skitter across the deck.

I made a wild grab for it but there were half a dozen dancing legs in my way. And that one grab nearly cost me my eyes. Gratz pounced on me. His two hands darted out, thumbs and forefingers pronged like the tines of a rake. They clawed savagely for my eyeballs. A fingernail, just missing my right eye, plowed deep across my cheekbone and the runnel it left in my flesh stung as the lighted cigarette had stung my bare belly only a few minutes—or was it hours?—ago.

I whirled, bent my head down and butted it full into the face of the man who was trying to blind me. I felt his teeth give under the shock. Gratz' head snapped back and he fell away from me. I surged after him, wild anger boiling like an acid bath in my brain.

Somewhere behind me Johnny and Clyde had gone into action. But just now that didn't seem important. My world was a circumscribed place, a tight circle only a few feet in diameter where at long last I had closed with Otto Gratz. He and I were alone in this little circle and that was the only thing which now seemed important. He and I hit the deck together with a spine-jarring crash—and I was on top. I went for his throat, but somehow he pulled his knees up under me, lashed out with his legs and almost disemboweled me. For an instant my grip on him slackened—and in that instant he had squirmed over on his stomach. Now I was on top of him. With cold savagery I grabbed two handfulls of his hair and began to bang his face up and down on the deck, throwing my whole weight into every wicked downward thrust.

Somebody loomed over me in the darkness. Automatically I ducked my head as a gun exploded almost behind my right ear. A blast of heated air singed my hair but I hardly noticed. I was almost unseated from Gratz' body as the man—to save his face from being battered to a squashy pulp—pushed himself to his



hands and knees. I slid my hands across his shoulders, hunting for his throat. But Gratz tucked his chin hard down against his breastbone, preventing my hands from reaching his throat.

At every second I expected to get a bullet through the head from the black figure beside me. I prayed for time enough to kill this Nazi rat who had murdered Pete Damon and directly caused the slaughter of Mr. Halliday, and Shot-gun and God knew how many others.

The gun jammed itself against the side of my head. I held my breath, waiting for it to blow my skull into fragments. But there was the sound of one firm body crashing into another. The gun no longer pressed against my head.

"Nice work, Gay," came Johnny's voice very tired. "I've got him now."

My hands couldn't reach Gratz' throat, but they met one another beneath his bristly chin. Well, that would do. I locked them there. The man was thrashing around like a dying cat, but my weight was holding him where he was. I got my elbows set on his shoulders and got good leverage as I put everything I had into bending his egg-shaped head backward.

He screamed suddenly, a shrill, despairing shriek which turned into a throaty rattle as I heard his spine snap with a sound exactly like that when you break a thick stick over your knee. His head rolled loosely, horribly, in my hands. His arms and legs collapsed and he flattened out on the deck, limp as a French doll. I pushed myself off his lifeless form. There was one more of these lousy Nazis somewhere.

And then, suddenly, everything exploded into incandescent brilliance. A white light, intolerable in its intensity, slammed into our eyes, blinding us—driving us all into incredulous silence—with its unexpected glare.

"A searchlight!" Clyde gasped. "From over there—on the port side!"

The dazzling source of that light was close-by. And now, in that sudden quiet, we could all hear the whine of blowers and the throb of beating propellers.

To our astonished ears came the deep sound of a hail: "Ship ahoy!" roared a good American voice. "What ship is that?"

My heart leaped. I raced to the rail. "The *Privateer,* out of Miami!" I yelled at the top of my voice.

"Stop your engines!" the megaphoned voice roared back. "We're sending a boarding party over! This is the United States Destroyer *Kerry!*

XXI

"I THINK," Johnny sighed, "that I'll lie down for a little while."

The light was still on us and in its cruel brilliance Johnny's face—even his lips—were chalk-white. With an apologetic smile he sat right down at our feet, then stretched himself out comfortably on the deck.

"There was another Nazi," said Clyde raggedly.

And even as he spoke, he and I, simultaneously, saw that other Nazi. Hellmuth, it was, and he had the sub-machine-gun. He was standing crouched in what had once been the shadow of the stack, but which was now lividly white in the terrific brilliance of the searchlight. He had been wounded. A great dark splotch was visible on the front of his flyer's coveralls and his face was ghastly, his eyes expanded, his lips skinned back over his teeth. He was looking at me with a fixed stare and was lifting his sub-machine-gun—lifting it as if it weighed a thousand pounds—to point it directly at me.

Behind him, but much too far behind him, was my crew, or what was left of it. They had seen him, too, and some of them had already got under way, racing toward him to try to take him before he could pull his trigger. But even as I glanced at them I knew they would be too late by three or four seconds, and a fraction of one second would be more than enough.

I took a quick step forward, but as I got my tired legs moving I knew that I hadn't a chance, either. The ugly snout of that gun was level at last and its beady eye was staring straight at me. In that blazing light from the destroyer I saw Hellmuth's forefinger tighten on the trigger. I tried to dodge, knowing all the while he could follow me with that gun, but I had to do something.

But it wasn't I who did something. A sudden movement beside me caught my eye. Clyde Gray's right arm swept forward with the speed of a striking rattlesnake. And from his hand went the pry-bar, a wicked shaft of blued steel, hooked on one end, flattened to a wedge-shaped edge at the other. It whirled around and

around like a lethal pinwheel as it flew toward the Nazi gunman, the blaze of the searchlight bouncing dully from its dark surface. Hellmuth saw it coming. His expression broke into a look of utter horror. He dropped the muzzle of the machine-gun and tried to sidestep the whirling bar of forged steel.

He was too late by the wink of an eyelash. He dropped the gun and threw out his hands as if he could ward the thing off with his bare palms. He stepped backward, coming up with a thump against the thin sheet steel of the stack.

And there, the pry-bar caught him. There was a dull *thwuck* and a metallic *ping*. And Hellmuth stood there before us all, the pry-bar's claw end quivering as the rest of it pinned him to the curved surface of the stack like a bug to a bit of cardboard. He screamed wildly and then grabbed with both hands at the shaft of steel which projected from his chest. Then his knees buckled, his chin dropped, and he died there, still pinioned to the stack.

The crew, still charging forward, clustered around him, mercifully cutting him off from our view. Sick and shaking, I turned toward Gay. But apparently she had not seen this horrible thing. She was sitting on deck, and Johnny's head was in her lap.

Hurrying over to them, I became suddenly aware that the deck had ceased vibrating under my feet. I had given no orders to shut down the engine. I guessed that Tom Malloy, at the emergency wheel, had—not knowing what had happened to me—used his own judgment and pulled the telegraph handle to "Stop."

Johnny's blue eyes were open. They were watching me as I came to him and dropped to the deck beside him.

"It doesn't hurt," he said, "but I think I'll take a little nap."

"Can't you wait a little while?" I blurted, not remembering that a destroyer carries only a pharmacist's mate, not a surgeon.

"He's tired, Terry," Gay said, softly.

And as I sat there, the bitterness of gall on my tongue, she bent over and kissed Johnny full on the lips.

"That was nice, Gay," Johnny said. "When I wake up I'll—I'll ask—you—to do it—again."

"And why not, my dear?" Gay asked him, her voice like a blessing.

And that was the way that my brother Johnny died, with his head in Gay's lap and the fragrance of her kiss upon his lips. Behind us Clyde Gray stood in silence. I could hear the crew moving toward us, too. Their footfalls died out for a moment or two, then shuffled away. But not far away. A few of them were doing something about Hellmuth. The others waited to see what they could do about Johnny. Have I said they were pretty fond of Johnny?

"Terry!" Gay said in a breaking voice. "I've done all I can."

Tired to my very bones, my mind dulled by all I had been through, I nodded gravely.

"Sure you have," I said soberly. "Sure."

I got up. My belly hurt, and so did my head, which had taken a lot of beating that long day. But most of all my heart ached. I bent over, slid my arms under Johnny's shoulders and knees and lifted my brother into my arms. It was lighter than day there on the boat deck as I carried Johnny to the chartroom to put him on the settee. But the minute I entered that remembered room I knew that Johnny wouldn't want to sleep there. Mueller and little Hymie Bloch were there, still in each other's arms—but on the floor. Gay was so close beside me that her slim arm was touching mine. I felt her shudder uncontrollably when she saw these two who seemed to be still fighting in death.

"Take Johnny to your cabin, Terry," Gay said in a choked voice. "He—he'll like it better there."

I nodded, glad to have her tell me what to do. There was a clatter of feet on the

bridge ladder. I didn't bother to look. I strode to my cabin, cradling Johnny in my arms. I elbowed the light switch, placed Johnny tenderly on my berth. He looked very comfortable there. He seemed glad to be resting at last.

Gay and I were still looking silently down at him when the footfalls stampeded along the deck and skidded to a stop outside the cabin door.

"Put your hands up!" said a crisp American voice.

I didn't bother to put my hands up. I looked around. A group of sailors togged out in gun-belts and leggings, and the officer was leveling a service automatic at me.

"Be yourself, Mister," I snapped at him. "This is an American vessel, and I'm her captain."

His eyes wavered doubtfully. They touched Gay and softened a bit. They touched Johnny's placid figure and hardened again.

"That's my brother," I said, before he could speak. "And did you see the bodies in the chartroom?"

"I did," he retorted. "What is it—mutiny?"

"This vessel was in the hands of the Nazis since daybreak," I said. "We just succeeded in taking her away from them. They're all dead."

Oh, I don't blame him for being a little skeptical. After all it isn't given to many new single-stripers to step into a shambles like this.

"Chief," he said over his shoulder, "have you posted your men?"

"Yis, sor," said a broad Irish voice. "From stem to stern, and a mess it is, sor."

"Let me see your papers," the young ensign demanded, still holding the gun on me.

I was too tired to argue with him. I ached all over. And Gay, standing stiffly beside me, looked about ready to pass out. Wearily I spun the knob of the ship's safe and pulled out the portfolio of papers.

"Mister," I said, "how would you like to capture the German sea raider *Frankfurt?*"

Sudden flame came into his eyes, but it turned swiftly into doubt.

"Go on from there," he snapped.

"At dawn—and that isn't many hours from now, the *Frankfurt* will be waiting to make rendezvous with this vessel at Latitude 27 degrees, 50 minutes, Longitude 69 degrees." And when he just stared at me in patent unbelief, I lost patience. "Mister," I snarled, "remember the lieutenant at Pearl Harbor who didn't believe what the non-com at the listening post told him—that the Japs were coming? Want to be like that?"

"Hennesy!" the ensign said without turning his head, "stand in the beam of the searchlight and wigwag back to the C.O. Remember what he told us—and the latitude and longitude?"

"Yes, sir," said a breathless voice from behind him. And footsteps raced away on the steel deck.

Gay sighed very gently. I caught her as she pitched face-down toward the carpet. I lifted her into my arms and looked squarely at the young officer.

"Get out of my way, Mister," I said levelly. "You have my papers. Now I'm going to take this lady to her cabin. If you want to shoot me, go ahead and to hell with you."

He did not shoot me. He just stared at me, as if he were seeing me for the first time.

"You look as if you had been keelhauled—sir," he said, respectfully. "Can I help you carry the young lady?"

"No thanks," I said, stepping across the coaming as he and the seamen stepped aside for me. I hesitated just one moment and glanced back at the berth where Johnny lay so quietly. "When you are through in here, Mister," I said, "please leave the light on and close the door."

I stalked aft along the boat deck, still

ablaze with that prodigious glare from the invisible destroyer alongside. I had to walk around Gratz, alias Ganss, who was sprawled flat on his belly, with his face turned around in an unnatural way. Kurth and Hellmuth were there, too—and Hellmuth was still pinned to the stack by that wicked pry-bar. Two or three of my men were lying there on the deck, too.

Gay sighed and stirred in my arms. "I—I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Keep your eyes shut," I said sharply, not wanting her to see what I was seeing—especially Gratz and Hellmuth.

She turned her sweet face toward me as if she knew why I had spoken so. It was nice, carrying her like that, with her face snugly pressed between my shoulder and chin. I could have carried her forever, tired as I was. A few minutes ago I had felt as if I couldn't have lifted a sounding lead. But, strangely enough, Gay seemed to weigh nothing at all.

I carried her down the ladder to the main deck. I could see faithful Tom Malloy standing at the now-idle wheel. He was looking into the darkness to port, blinking against the slamming light of the searchlight as he tried to make out the blue-black silhouette of the destroyer.

THERE was another figure back there, too. Searle Weymouth, who saw me as I carried Gay toward the door of the lounge. He leaped to his feet and came charging toward me, his arms waving wildly.

"Captain," he cried, a thin edge of hysteria in his voice, "I demand that you put Gay and me aboard that warship. The things I've been through! I can't stand it, I tell you! I just can't stand it! I'm an artist and—"

"Go away, Searle," said Gay in her fatigue-drugged voice.

"You're coming with me and—" he said, almost in a scream.

"I'm not going anywhere, especially with you," said Gay, wearily.

"Tom!" I called over his shoulder.

Tom Malloy started, looked at us, then came on the run.

"Take him," I said, jerking my chin at the frantic actor. "Take him and lock him in his cabin, where he can't bother us."

Tom grinned and moved in on Searle Weymouth, and that was the last I saw of the actor until the towering white hotels of Miami Beach pushed themselves over the horizon.

I went through the main lounge. Gay's arm was around my neck and her fragrant hair was very close to my nostrils. I carried her down the passageway to her cabin. It was the nicest one on the ship—the one my mother and father had used when the *Privateer* had been our private yacht. It was peaceful in here, after all we had been through. Battle, murder and sudden death seemed a million knots away. Very gently I put her on one of the beds. Her lovely eyes were open and she looked up at me, smiling shakily.

"I could have walked, Terry," she murmured, "but it was fine being in your arms."

I heard someone hurrying along the passageway. It was the kid ensign. He stopped at the door, glanced in, then he coughed apologetically.

"Captain," he said, excitedly, "the message has come back from the *Kerry*. They knew the *Frankfurt* was somewhere in the Atlantic. The skipper had radioed to all our ships in these waters, and right now they'll all be underway, converging on her." His voice rose in excitement. "But we'll be first, Captain—thanks to you. I've been ordered back aboard, but the skipper wants to know if you are short-handed, or can you get back to Miami with the crew you have left? If you can't, we'll leave some of our personnel aboard."

Briefly I considered. On the bridge—Mr. Halliday was dead, and so was one of the quartermasters, but by standing continuous watch we could get along all right.

In the engine room—Johnny was dead, but Clyde Gray was so used to taking extra tricks a few more wouldn't matter. He could doze in his chair at the throttle. Shot-gun, who had smelled death aboard—he was dead, too, but Handy could double as cook and cabin steward.

"My compliments to your commanding officer," I said formally, "and tell him we'll get back to Miami without any trouble. And good luck at dawn tomorrow morning."

He vanished. I stood where I was, oddly dreading to go back to the bridge and to start the *Privateer* on her sad voyage back to Miami, with her cargo of dead.

I didn't know I was speaking aloud, but suddenly I heard myself saying:

"Johnny is better off, really. He'd never have got over his—his trouble. And Mr. Halliday, he's glad to stop living with his memories. But the others—"

GAY swung her slim legs over the edge of her bed and sat there looking at me.

"Stop it, Terry," she commanded, and I stopped it. For some moments she searched my expression. Then, deliberately, she rose and stood directly before me. "Terry," she said in a very low voice, "couldn't you say something nice to me? If you have a girl somewhere, will you tell me?"

Like a damned fool I sucked in my breath and just stared down at her, unable to put the things I was thinking into words. But maybe she was clairvoyant, or something.

"I'm through with Hollywood, you know, Terry," she said, softly. "Acting just isn't in me. I don't like it. And now that little Hymie doesn't need me, I'm never going back. Not ever again."

I'm a sailor, not a Great Lover. And I've been at sea so much I've had damned little experience with girls. The things I wanted to say to this lovely child got caught in my throat, which was as dry and rough as sandpaper. So I just put out my arms, gathered her into them and brought her hard against me. Her beautiful face came up and I put my lips fully against hers, while the world stood still and all my aches and troubles faded into the darkness of the sea-spiced night.

"Darling," I said in a choked voice, "I've decided. I'm going to turn this vessel over to the Navy. I've been offered two full stripes, and I'm going to take them. Could you—could you wait for me until we've licked the Nazis and the Wops and the Japs?"

She bent her head back, looking straight up into my eyes.

"Two full stripes?" she whispered. "That's a lieutenant, isn't it?"

"Lieutenant, senior grade," I told her

She took a long, deep breath. "No," she said, "I couldn't wait for you. But on a lieutenant's pay you could support me, if we were both very economical. What's to prevent your marrying me as soon as we get back to Miami?"

From the darkness outside the open port I could hear the lifting whine of the destroyer's blowers, the sudden thrash of her four propellers as they churned into the phosphorescent water. Her searchlight dissolved into nothing at all, and the sound of her moved swiftly away from us, leaving us alone on a warm and friendly sea. In a few hours she would be carrying death and destruction to the raider which flew the crooked cross of the Nazis, and Johnny, and Mr. Halliday, and Shot-gun, and the bosun and the rest would not have died for nothing.

I listened and heard only the remembered sounds of my own ship. Then, once more, I tasted the sweetness of Gay's bright lips.

"Come with me to the bridge, darling," I whispered. "We're going places—together!"

Twenty-five Miles from the Placer Camp of Bootleg Bar —that Was Where a Doctor Was Desperately Needed!

NOT FOR GOLD

By GEORGE BRUCE MARQUIS

Author of "The Crook of an Eyebrow," etc.

THE Indian according to custom had entered without ceremony. Disdaining a monitory knock, he had simply pushed the door open and padded into the cabin. The three men in the cabin received him according to their lights. Whispering Thompson grumbled cavernously, "A damned Siwash ain't got no manners." Doc Levitt smiled, "What nonchalance! What poise!" Bat Jennison who knew Indians said in Nez Perce, "What is it, my brother?"

The Indian reacted according to his lights. To Thompson he disclaimed gutturally, "Me no *Siwash,* yo' bet yo' my life!" To Levitt's understanding smile, there was a summer lightning response in kind. To Jennison he said, "Come, my brother, I would show thee something."

Outside the cabin, the Indian pointed up the river canyon. Twenty-five miles north of this placer camp of Bootleg Bar lay the insignificant town of Drowsy. Bracing Drowsy's feeble back towered a dome of rock, its top in clear view from Bootleg Bar. Long utilized by Indians for signaling, such was its use now. Into the still air were pouring columns of smoke, their symmetry marred at intervals by irregular blobs. Then it suggested huge woolly beads strung on the thin central smoke cote. Jennison was Indian enough to know it for Indian sky writing, but he was not Indian enough to read it. He turned to his companion to ask in Nez Perce:

"What means it?"

"It tells it," so the Indian interpreted, "that at that Drowsy lies a white squaw in great need of a *tewat* (doctor). Also that

with her is a white papoose. So." His vivid pantomime registered a tiny babe.

Doc Levitt and Thompson had followed them out and now in answer to a question, Jennison translated the graceful Nez Perce into his own venacular.

"Doc," he said soberly, "it says that thar's a sick white woman bad in need of a doctor and if that ain't hell enough, she's nursin' a new come baby."

Levitt's instant reaction was the epitome of his professional code.

"Then I must go to Drowsy."

"But, Doc," Thompson protested with an iron-clad catalog of indisputable facts, "it's twenty-five miles to that camp and there's four feet of snow, two feet fresh fell. There's not a horse in these diggings and none nearer than fifty miles. There's not a snowshoe in Bootleg Bar, nor anybody who could use it if there was. Besides, it's twenty below zero and you're not able to make the trip. Only a natural damn fool would try it."

"Moren that," Jennison contributed, "thar's not been even a Injun cayuse over that road fur a month and thar ain't a sled in camp and if we had one it couldn't be dragged through this soft snow. It's a two-day trip as the weather stacks up and we've gotta take grub, blankets, et celery along. What we need is one of them taboscoes with a turned up front and flat bottom."

"Yes, Bat," Levitt corrected without seeming to do so, "we could get along handsomely with a toboggan. Yet you and I will manage."

"What do you mean, *'you* and *I'?"* Thompson raged into the plan making. "You ain't cutting *me* out of that fun. Hell! I can lope that far without stopping to rest even."

Levitt laid a slim white hand on the arm of the indignant giant.

"Whispering," said he, "you and Bat and I are one. *We* will go to Drowsy."

"Since that's settled, Doc," Jennison said briskly, "s'pose you flax 'round in the cabin whilst Whisperin' and me ranny downtown to git something to haul our stuff on. We'll need grub and blankets and our heavy clothes, 'specially grub." He turned to the Indian to add, "Send thou the message that the *tewat* comes."

As they plowed through the feathery snow, Jennison expounded an idea to Thompson.

"I've gotta notion, Whisperin', about that sled. Down in the blacksmith shop I've seen a slab of sheet iron that Spratling planned to bottom his riffle box with and didn't. It's thin, so it 'ud give climbin' over bumps, it's light but tough. The sides and ends could be crimped up and holes punched in 'em fur thongs to lash our dunnage on with. The end could be turned up like an old-fashioned sleigh and straps fastened thereto fur pullin' it. Let's drop by Friedley's cabin and ask him about fixin' it."

Friedley, holding up his unbelted trousers with one hand, shivered in the doorway while Jennison made brief work of his errand. Then the craftsman spoke through the medium of the humble smith.

"I can do it," he nodded emphatically, "I'll gallop right down and have at it. You need a toboggan and that's what you'll get."

"That's the damned name I've been tryin' to think of," Jennison said disgustedly. "We'll be down at the store or saloon, mebby."

There were men at the store who tried to dissuade them. But not the patriarch of the flock, Ahab Spratling. Yet of all the men, he knew best the dangers faced. So he interlarded sage advice, minute as to detail, with a plain analysis of perils that might be encountered. Most of all as to traveling with wet feet should the temperature drop sharply as he predicted.

"You've got to cross the river a good hundred times," he summarized the difficulties, "and while the river's froze hard as a donnick in places there'll be spots where it'll not be so. If you break through you've got to stop and get a fire going. If

it gets colder like I figger, you'll find you can't hold a match tight enough to strike it. It'll twist round in your fingers so numb you can't even feel that they belong to your body. I know from experience. But I can fix you up and I'll trot over to my cabin and do it. Wait here for me."

Minutes later he was back carrying two ten-pound lard pails, both tight lidded. As the men crowded round, he displayed his treasure. In one were a dozen finger-sized sticks of richest pitch pine. The end of each had been carefully split halfway down and in the cleft had been embedded a half dozen sulphur matches with little more than the heads protruding. With justifiable pride, he commented on his exhibits.

"No difference how cold your fingers are short of being actually froze, you can hold one of the sticks and scratch it. I reckon you know whether that pitch will catch fire or not." He pried the lid from the other bucket to disclose its contents to be pitch pine whittlings. "And if the other don't take hold hard enough to suit you," he explained, "sift on a sprinkling of these shavings. Even if they get damp they'll burn like all sixty. Also take a few sticks of wood along. For when you need a fire you need it then. Fumbling round in a blizzard and it forty below zero for dry kindling ain't just what you'd call a picnic. I know."

THE storekeeper was rummaging around and now he appeared with a box that rattled as he set it down on the counter.

"If that woman's sick," he stated, "she can't nurse no baby. And that fly speck of a camp won't have no milk. There's a dozen cans there which is all I've got. And here's that ham, Whispering. You'll pay for it? Like hell! What kind of a Siwash do you figger me to be, anyway? Also a sack of self-rising flour and a half dozen cans of greengage plums. Think of anything else you need?

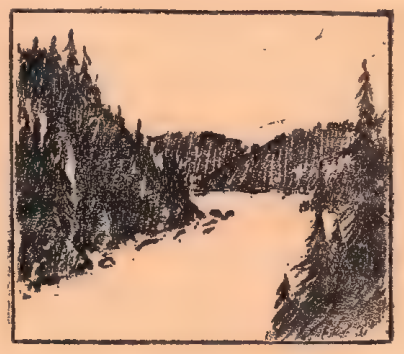
"Yep," Jennison grinned. "We need a freight wagon and a team to lug it."

Sad Sommerville, the saloonman, barged in at that moment.

"Just heard you boys were pulling out for Drowsy," he said in doleful tones. "Thinks I, they'll be needing a little whiskey freshen 'em up, likely. Here's three pints for your pockets and the gallon for extry." And he hoisted a wicker encased demijohn up to keep company with the stately ham. And he added pridefully, "That demijohn won't freeze short of forty below zero, for it's not watered. *That's* whiskey."

"Which," as Spratling observed sagely, "gives you a sure fire thermometer. It'll take forty below to ice up good whiskey."

Half an hour later, the extempore toboggan stood before the store, loaded and ready. All the population able to be on their feet were there ready with a last moment's advice, but chiefly to bid them good speed. Among them was the Indian and now he beckoned Jennison aside.



"Have a care, my brother," he said solemnly. "Soon will you feel the breath of Spelya and his breath is death. Have care." Spelya, the god of cold, master of the bitter north wind, warring forever with Chinook, god of the warm south wind. And Jennison answered with equal gravity.

"Pray thou to thy *Manitou* that Chinook, not Spelya wins this day the battle."

Jennison, a hundred thirty-five pounds of sinew and toughened muscle, broke trail. Two feet of fresh snow blanketed two feet of old, this packed and solid. The new snow had snailed down from a cold dead sky. It lay like the lightest of soap flakes

and at every step, Jennison sank to his knees. Behind him plowed Thompson, two hundred fifty pounds, reputed to be the strongest man, with the largest foot and most stentorian voice west of the Rockies. He tugged forward the improvised toboggan, smoothing out a tolerable path for Levitt. Levitt, older, not very robust, was their constant anxious thought. For they loved the learned and urbane medico with a very great love and they doubted his strength for the bitter trial before him.

At the end of a mile they halted at the edge of the river. It was in fact a river by courtesy only, rarely reaching a width of thirty feet. Here was their first crossing, to be repeated many times, as the old freight road swung from one side to the other of the narrow canyon. These fords as a rule were at spots free from riffles and before the first snow fell, the pools and level stretches had been frozen. Yet they must make sure. Jennison unleashed the shovel from the toboggan and cleared away the snow down to the ice. Then while Levitt rested, Jennison and Thompson sounded the flinty roadway for flaws. None appeared and the passage was safely made.

They made good time and by one o'clock were some ten miles from Bootleg Bar with fifteen to go. That fifteen was the toughest part of their journey. The way was steeper, rougher, more winding and the snow grew deeper with the miles. Here they halted. They were hungry and beside the road bubbled a huge spring. Here was water for coffee and a convenient dead birch offered itself as fuel. Yes, they needed food, but they halted after all because of Levitt.

Thompson became fire master and chef while Jennison cared for their companion. Game and uncomplaining, yet his trembling limbs, his rapid breathing told a plain story. Jennison, by dint of clever generalship, contrived to stretch him on the cleared toboggan and cover him with a buffalo robe. Ten thousand labored words could not have enrichened the story told by the glances that passed between the two. They must travel more slowly, they would camp earlier that evening, they might even manage to persuade him to ride. At times. So long as Levitt could drag one leaden foot after the other, it would be difficult. For he had his pride and like many another able man was stubborn.

They fried bacon, for the portly ham was reserved for the evening meal. Also they cooked flapjacks and made much black coffee. Jennison and Thompson were eaters of renown in a region where they flourished. Levitt, a perennially light eater furnished the peerless trenchermen feeble competition. As a demitasse they had whiskey, ditto as dessert.

Thompson shook the demijohn.

"Anyway," he chuckled, "it's not down yet to forty below. It still gurgles."

"And we ain't yit had to use any of Ahab's shavin's," Jennison added.

Levitt glanced at the deep unfrozen spring that lapped at the very edge of the road.

"If one of us misstep and land in a trap like that," he remarked thoughtfully, "Ahab's patent rapid fire kindlings may save a life."

BY TWO o'clock they were again on the move. A mile brought them to the only break in the tortuous ravine. It was a vast outspread of the high walls, a sort of monstrosity in canyon architecture named by some venturing French fur trader, The Grande Rounde. To get the picture, imagine a lozenge-shaped balloon laid crosswise of the river gorge, a balloon whose upstream diameter was a long three miles. The frieght road ran a straight furrow here, for the ground was flat and trees were absent. Under present conditions it would be the easiest part of their trip and Jennison greeted it with a sigh of relief. For a moment only. Then his pleasure had been transmuted into wonder, then dismay.

He could not see across the level plain

and the mountains beyond were blotted out! Yet the day was clear without a whimsy even of a cloud. Behind them toward Bootleg Bar, the river canyon lay clear, the mountain peaks far away etched sharply against the blue green sky. Ahead a white wall spanned the river gorge, a topless moving barricade. Spelya, god of the north wind, was speeding to the attack.

Jennison and his companions moved swiftly to mute that savage onslaught. Earflaps were snuggled down, their heavy buffalo overcoats taken from the toboggan and donned in haste, the lashings rechecked. And with scant conversation. They must breast that raging blizzard for a good three miles to reach passably sheltering timber, they must above all keep together. So a heavy thong was anchored to the rear of the toboggan and the end wrapped, not tied, about Levitt's hand. A second thong went from Thompson's belt to Jennison's fist. In the face of what lay before them, they must take no unnecessary chances.

"And, Doc," Thompson counseled in generous, round about fashion, "lug back on that rope. It'll help steady the sled and tell me you're still with us."

"Thanks, Whispering," Levitt smiled understandingly. "You look like a woolly mammoth in that overcoat and your heart is built to match it."

"That wind's comin' straight out of the north," Jennison analyzed his pilot problem. "If I keep it ridin' the bridge of my nose, I cain't go wrong. Well, if Doc's set, let's ramble. I want to beat that damned blizzard to the draw."

To project Jennison's vivid figure of speech, we would record that if that straight fronted wall were a flesh and blood antagonist, then Jennison would have had time to fire one lone shot before he was smothered in its icy attack. And cold. The temperature dropped at an unbelievably swift gradient. Choking too, for the furious gale had ripped away the two foot covering of light snow and now drove it like frozen birdshot, mingled with frozen mist. To see was all but impossible. If a man had waded along the bottom of an immense bowl filled high above his head with soap bubbles, he could have seen his pathway more clearly.

His body bent almost at a right angle, Jennison lugged with every ounce of his strength on the cord attached to Thompson's belt as he plowed into that snow packed wind. It was not unlike wading chin deep in ice chilled water. Behind him puffed Thompson, whose giant muscles were taxed to the uttermost limit in battling the storm itself and tugging onward the toboggan with its drag weight of the worn doctor. For Levitt could not have breasted that hurricane without the aid of the thong. Ice formed about their bearded lips, snow nicked above their eyebrows. Time ceased to have meaning. How many times they stopped for brief gasping recovery of strength, they could never have told. Later they were to know that nearly three hours snailed by on that three-mile stretch of trail.

It would have long been dark when at last they reached the timber, but for the dull shimmer of the hard packed snow. The wind was as violent as ever, but the air was practically free from snow. Dredged of its sediment, it seemed colder, sharper, more penetrating. They must camp soon, but where was not to be of their choosing. Stark necessity would furnish the moment, benevolent chance the place.

They had crossed the river once more and were inching their way around an elbow of rugged cliff when disaster smote with a steel shod fist. They had lost Levitt! At Thompson's horrified yell, Jennison's numbed legs all but buckled under him. This for a moment, then he and Thompson were searching the back trail. In effort it was miles, in distance yards, calling, listening, plodding on.

Now above the roar of the wind, Jennison heard Levitt's call, faint, uncertain as

to distance and location. But for a moment only. Then Jennison was on his knees at the edge of the road with Levitt just beyond reach. A stumbling step and he had slid feet foremost into a pool of water, a spring that would not freeze. How to hoist him out was solved upon the instant of his discovery. Jennison drew off his mittens and leaned down with Thompson gripping his legs. Levitt held up his arms, Jennison clamped his icy fingers about Levitt's wrists and Thompson performed an uncatalogued feat of Hercules.

Soaked to the armpits in a temperature hovering around fifty below zero, emphasized by a bitter wind, they must move swiftly to save him. Jennison stripped off his overcoat and wrapped it about Levitt's legs and Thompson's made of his friend's frail body, a woolly cocoon, then they laid him on the toboggan and covered him with their blankets. Yet this was but a temporary expedient. They must have shelter and a fire. As Jennison worried his numbed fingers back into his buffalo mittens, he remembered.

"Whisperin'," he chattered a prophecy, "I'll bet we can find a sheltered spot in that cliff. Seems to me thar's holes along here about."

THE last few words floated back over his shoulders, for he was off the road and fumbling his way through the brush and trees to the rugged cliff. A whoop told of success, then he was back bubbling with almost incredible news. Right there, just a few yards off, was a perfectly jimdandy cave, with a dead tree for wood laid across the doorway.

Half dragging, half carrying, they reached the cave, lifted the toboggan bodily over the fallen tree and so into the cave itself. What they needed now was a fire. With hand stiff beyond the power of holding an axe handle, Thompson by sheer strength wrenched, shouldered and twisted away six-inch limbs from the fallen tree, while Jennison contrived to worm off the tight tin lid from Ahab Spratling's gift. Besides, they had hauled along an armload of dry wood just in case. Spratling's forethought saved them. To have held match and strike it would have been impossible.

The splintered ends of the limbs were full of pitch and soon a fire roared up at the end and side of the cave. And they fed it prodigally. Thompson, with fingers thawed somewhat, roamed out with the precious axe, heaving his spoils in at the side of the cave till their fuel pile looked like a winter's supply. The two last cuttings were the upper end of the lightning blasted tree, furnishing front and back logs, guaranteed to burn for hours.

"How are you, Doc?" Jennison asked anxiously as he uncovered Levitt's face.

"Snug as a bug in a particularly cozy rug," Levitt smiled back. "I note that you have a fire."

"A reglar peach," Jennison declared. "We're gittin' this cave het up like a dutch oven so as we can strip you."

"Don't hurry," Levitt said in drowsy comfort. "But leave my face uncovered so I can watch the dance of the flames on the roof. Who would exchange this for a castle in Spain?"

"I dunno, Doc," Jennison admitted. "And anyway, I don't want no Dago castells in Spain nor any place else."

Thompson lumbered in with his last towering load, the fire was ricked across the entrance, presently they were shedding clothes in deference to its power. By the light of the leaping flames, they computed the size of the cave. About six feet by fifteen, roofed in curved way like a prairie schooner, floor, walls and solidly blocked rear end smooth. Surely fortune had been generous.

With Levitt stripped and reclothed in dry garments and his sopping clothes stretched out to dry, they thought of food —and whiskey. For coffee they must melt snow, so Jennison hurdled the small end of their continuous barricade of flames to heap high a miner's pan with snow. What

to them that it was not crystal clear, that shreds of bark and even an occasional pitchy splinter appeared to add its own dubious contribution to the stout brew? What indeed? They were sheltered, warm and safe, with hunger chasing food aplenty. So they dined like monarchs. For this was indeed their castle.

As Jennison slugged down his last drop of coffee, an imprisoned pocket of moisture in a burning limb suddenly burred shrilly. Jennison leaped to his feet, his tin cup clanged to the rock floor, his face whitened under the tan. In imagination, he had heard the only thing in heaven or earth he feared, a rattlesnake.

"Boys," he said fearfully, "I know now where we're holed up. This is a rattlesnake den. Last summer when I rode by here there was thousands, well, anyway, dozens of 'em wrigglin' and lollin' right here in this very spot."

"Yep," Thompson contributed out of a capacious mouth crammed with ham and flapjacks. "I saw 'em along with you. What of it? They're hundreds of feet back in the cliffs now. They hibernate in cold weather. Have another flapjack."

"They mebby do incubate," Jennison admitted doubtfully. "But what if they mistook the heat of our campfire fur the call of spring?"

"You figger one of 'em is likely to pop out of his hole," Thompson scoffed, "and crawl over to the fire to thaw out his rattles. Their holes are likely all outside. They just use the cave for get together parties, sociables and so forth."

"Let's look," Jennison said obstinately.

With a pitch torch, they investigated the recesses of the cave and found it. A hole, large as a man's knee, its edge as glassily smooth as though a graver's tool had ground it down. When it was plugged with a section of a limb driven in to the head, Jennison straightened up with a grunt of relief. Their castle was indeed freed from the possibility of intrusion.

It was hard upon the dawn when Jennison awoke and nudged Thompson out of his slumber. Frost bite had appeared and Thompson swore guardedly as he forced his swollen toes into his number sixteen boots. Levitt's sleep had been fitful and now the two conversed in low tones while they stirred the somnolent fire to action and set about preparing breakfast. Before they waked him, they had made a decision. Come what may, Levitt must ride.

Levitt protested like the gentleman he was, but his companions were adamant. He was weak, somewhat feverish and one heel was badly frostbitten. It was not enough to get him to Drowsy. There his task would really begin. So they bundled him onto the sledge, surrounded him with brick-sized rocks pried up from beneath their campfire and covered him with blankets. They carried too, a respectable cording of dry wood. Despite the calm, they took no chances. Their escape the night before had been too perilously scant to dare risks now.

IT WAS still, clear and bitterly cold, when Thompson set his giant shoulders to the leather braces and limped uncomplainingly away. Jennison followed to watch that their baggage did not trickle away, but most of all to care for Levitt. Three times they halted to build fires and make coffee. Once they cooked a hasty meal. The going grew steeper, rougher, and they discovered that the grueling battle of the day before had taken a great toll from their strength. One thing alone favored them. The weather moderated greatly. They pushed indomitably ahead

and near sunset reached their goal. A turn in the narrow ravine, a shoulder of rock outflanked, and they were in Drowsy, halting before the first cabin. A knock brought an unkempt miner to the door.

"Where's the sick woman?" Thompson labored out a thick question.

The miner stared at the giant Thompson, at Jennison, at Levitt, who had tottered to his feet. Then he said in awe,

"You *did* make it, then! We knowed you'd started, for we seen the Injun's signals. But hell! We figgered the blizzard got you. But you did make it."

"Yep," Jennison corroborated the other's hesitating faith in a modern-day miracle, "we made it with a doctor. Where's the sick woman and baby?"

"The baby's bein' nursed by a squaw up at the Injun camp," the miner answered the questions in reverse fashion. "The woman's right there," and his cocked thumb indicated the next cabin. "I'm afraid you've got here too late. Which one's the doc?"

"We ain't too late unless she's already done crossed the river of death." Thus Jennison placed the imprimatur of his faith on Levitt's skill. "This is the doctor. S'pose you summon the house."

AT THE miner's knock, the door opened and a man moved slowly into the doorway. Was he young or old? Jennison could not say, but as he halted there, Jennison thought him the saddest looking man he had ever seen. And the weariest. His red-rimmed, swollen eyes seemed unable to attain a focus on the group before his door. Then their guide spoke to him.

"Frank," he announced jubilantly, "these men just toiled in from Bootleg Bar. This one's a doctor."

The man started violently, a trembling hand fluttered to an uncertain grip on the door frame as he said haltingly, "Thank God! I hope—I hope—you've not come too late! Come in, Doctor."

Levitt, every inch the physician in times of crisis, had lifted his battered medicine bag from the sled and stood ready to enter the cabin. As the door swung wide to admit Levitt, Jennison caught a fleeting glimpse of a touseled bed and the fretful toss of a feverish hand.

A half-dozen men had gathered around the two wayfarers by now, eagerly curious, clumsy with compliments that came straight from their generous hearts, overflowing with hospitality. Why not come into my cabin and have a drink? How bad frostbit? Anyway, why not set down?

"I aim to stand," Thompson grinned, "because if I'd set now I'd never be able to get up under my own power."

To an unanimous, if low-voiced opinion, that Mary Manning could not possibly live, Jennison countered with an unqualified affirmative.

"Since she was alive when Doc crossed the threshold," so he predicated his statement, "she ain't goin' to die. She's now safe in the hands of the best doctor in this old United States and I wouldn't bar the whole damned universe. Nope. The angel of death had jest as well take his flight back. He ain't carryin' off nobody from this said cabin."

"The herbiverous truth," Thompson okayed throatily. "The old boy with the scythe is sure going to be skunked this time."

"We've been cookin' and carryin' Frank's grub to him," one of the men stated, "but the pore little woman ain't been eating anything. Why—"

The door opened and Levitt came outside.

"No," he said gravely in answer to an eager query, "it's impossible to say at this moment. Yet there's a chance and we'll take it. What I want now, men, is hot water and a container. A tub would answer, or something like that."

"I've got the sawed-off bottom of a whiskey barrel," one offered eagerly. "It 'ud hold mebby ten gallons. How'll that answer, Doc?"

"Excellently," Levitt smiled. "And now hurry with the hot water."

Tea kettles and buckets came steaming from the cabins to sufficiently fill and double fill the decapitated barrel.

"I scrubbed it out careful with soap and ashes," its architect boasted. "She's clean as a hound's tooth, you can bet on it."

"Thanks boys," Levitt praised their community effort, "you've done nobly." He looked at his trail companions. "Whispering," he suggested, "treat your frostbitten feet as I've told you. And both of you must get some rest. Especially you, Bat. I'll need you tonight. Manning is worn completely out. I'll give him a sleeping powder presently by hook or crook and then you'll be my helper."

Two hours later, Levitt came to the cabin where Thompson would stay that night. He had come for Jennison. As for Mrs. Manning, he hesitated to hazard a prediction. Of one thing, however, he was certain. The crisis would be reached within the next few hours.

Manning lay sprawled on a pallet, dead to the world. The sedative administered through guile, had done its perfect work. As they entered the cabin, Jennison in uncritical way inventoried the room and its meager contents. Small, dirt-floored, bare of ornaments save a whatnot coggled up in one corner, a fireplace in one end, a homemade table holding a candle set in a bottle, two chairs and a bed. And on that bed a woman, wracked with fever, face flushed, lips parched. And she murmured over something cradled in her arm and so snuggled against her breast. The baby, Jennison thought pityingly—then he knew. That bundle of rags was Levitt's clever contriving outlet for her love.

That night was to be graven deep in Jennison's memory as Levitt, tireless and resourceful, battled for the woman's life. And some way Levitt expanded and grew great in Jennison's eyes as with his skill he sought to checkmate death and woo the ebbing tides of life back again.

The pale light of dawning day began to shame the dull glow of the guttering candle. Then Levitt was on his feet, bending low over the woman. Her eyes opened to focus doubtfully on this stranger's face. Very kind were those gray eyes, very gentle the voice.

"My dear," he had said, "I'm the doctor. Everything is all right. Try to sleep."

And when she slumbered, he looked at Jennison and there was joy and exultation in that glance.

"Bat," he said softly, "the gates of death were ajar, but now they're closed."

"They didn't close of their own accord, Doc," Jennison said with a limp in his voice. "By God. *You* shouldered 'em shut."

IVAN

What Chance Was There of Reaching That Rescue Ship?

By

PATRICK O'KEEFFE

Author of "His Finest Hour," etc.

SITTING on a straight-backed chair in his hotel room, a gauze dressing covering a wide patch of his glossy hair, Strang said, "I told the reporters that I got away from the ship on a float. I didn't tell them that there was another man besides me on it.

He's among those listed as missing. The reporters—the naval authorities too—think that he went down with the ship. I let them go on thinking so."

Henry Lowther, the noted sea-story writer, lolling back in the easy-chair by the sun-lit window, blinked curiously behind gold-rimmed spectacles at Strang, whose lean figure looked really skinny in the tight-fitting suit lent to him on the ship that had picked him up.

"You knew that man, knew him at first hand," Strang went on. "And that might help to persuade you to do what I am about to ask. It was Ivan."

"Ivan." Henry Lowther smiled as he repeated the name; but there was no trace of amusement on Strang's tanned face as he remarked:

"You're thinking of the Ivan that passengers used to hear about. The man I'm speaking of is another Ivan, an Ivan that no one dreamed existed, least of all those —including myself—who used to entertain passengers with funny yarns about him.

"I don't know whether you know it, but his name wasn't really Ivan. It was Peter, Peter Smidovitch. It wasn't until after the second voyage or so that someone dubbed him Ivan. The name stuck. It seemed to go better with his black beard.

"He joined the ship as carpenter's mate, but was promoted to carpenter the follow-

ing trip. He was as pleased as if he'd been made an admiral instead of a petty officer. The first thing he did was buy a uniform cap. The bosun used to say he wore it to bed.

"You can guess that it wasn't long before the crew found out how easily fooled he was. The first ride they took him for was when they told him that the Old Man didn't mind petty officers mingling with passengers of an evening on the promenade deck. That same captain didn't like to see any kind of officer doing that. I think half the stewards in the ship must have been on hand to see the fun when he came on Ivan gayly dancing, and with a girl who dined at his table.

Henry Lowther smiled and nodded, conveying that he had heard the story.

"He came in for a lot of kidding, one way or another," said Strang. "But he always took it good-naturedly. You could not ruffle him. Sometimes he might give you an injured look with those wide blue eyes of his; but that was all. For a man who'd knocked about the world's waterfronts ever since he deserted the Czarist navy as a young man, he was the most inoffensive, most easily taken-in man you could imagine.

"But that is the Ivan who it is believed went down with the ship. The Ivan I asked you here about is the Ivan who lay adrift with me on a float not the size of a double mattress, with both of his legs paralyzed."

LEAVING Ivan for the moment, Strang went on to explain that at the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, the *Gladiolus,* a medium-sized passenger and freight ship, was making one of her usual cruises to the West Indies. On her return to New Orleans, she was chartered by the Army Transport Service to carry supplies and munitions to a few of the Caribbean bases. After having discharged the last of her cargo in Porto Rico, she was ordered to New York. It was on the second evening out that, as Strang phrased it, she was sent to a happier cruising ground.

That and ensuing events were still so vivid in his memory that when he began to relate them, it was as if he were living through them once more. He felt himself again to be the chief radio operator of the *Gladiolus* on that fateful evening. It was a few minutes past eight. The young third operator had just relieved him in the radio room, which, with every chink sealed during the nightly blackout, was as hot as a bakery. Strang was heading for the door when all at once the ship seemed to crash into a wall of dynamite.

Strang was hurled backward from the door, but managed to keep on his feet. The ship had heeled to port, but now swung over into a starboard list. Strang exchanged glances with the goggle-eyed third operator. He hastened to the door of the adjoining sleeping cabin and threw it open. But the second operator was already out of his bunk and hurriedly scrambling into his clothes.

"Stand by the motorboat set," Strang said.

The bridge telephone rang. Strang scribbled the message on a pad and passed it to the third operator.

"There's our position. Send the "S" warning and say we've been torpedoed."

Engine-room power still being available, the third operator pressed a switch that started a generator whining and the main transmitter tubes glowing; but when he tapped the sending key the antenna meter needle did not move. Strang hurriedly manipulated a tuning control, but with negative result.

Suspecting the trouble, he was about to dash outside when the lights suddenly went out as the door leading to the deck opened; they went on again automatically as it was pulled to. The tall, bearded carpenter stood inside, his blue eyes anxious.

"The radio wires are down," he said.

"Give me a hand to rig up the emergency antenna, Ivan," said Strang, not

thinking that Ivan had his own emergency station to go to.

Ivan waited while Strang got the spare coil from the battery room. Strang told the third operator to connect the small emergency transmitter to the short-wave receiving antenna and see what results he could get. He and Ivan then went out.

The ship was still completely blacked out. The radio cabin was on the after end of the boat deck, and crew members from aft were hurrying by on both sides in response to the alarm bells. Through the loudspeakers the captain's voice was telling the men to go to their boat stations, keep calm, and wait for further orders.

It was not the mast but the antenna bridle that had been snapped by the explosion. Ivan hurried down to the well deck, and Strang paid out one end of the spare coil to him. Then he went below to join him. The after part of the ship was now deserted except for him and Ivan. The ship's pulse was slowing up, and she slanted forward and sidewise as if down on one knee. Lights had gone on round the boats. Strang cast a glance across the dark sea. The night was calm and starlit, but he couldn't make out anything of the submarine.

As he was holding the wire clear of the winches, standing on the hatch, and Ivan was about to climb the mast ladder to make the wire fast midway, a terrific explosion blew Strang into the air. His head smashed against something with sickening force, and his senses flew like sparks into black extinction.

When, as it seemed to him, he kicked his way upward to life again, he became aware that he was lying on his back. His head was throbbing like a great boil. His eyes opened on darkness except for bright points above; slowly they took on the familiar pattern of Orion's glittering belt.

His clothes were wet. And his head was resting on something soft but wet, too. Something was lying across his chest. And then suddenly he sensed that someone was lying close beside him. He turned his hand to feel over the man.

"I am glad you move. I vos t'ink maybe you dead."

The weight was lifted from his chest, and he knew it to be Ivan's arm, thrown protectively across him like a deck-cargo grip. He explored with his other hand. It dipped with alarming ease into deep water; feeling further, he was startled to discover that he was adrift on a patent buoyancy float. It was exactly six feet by four. And there were two of them on it.

He sat up. "How did I get here?" he exclaimed.

Ivan, lying face downward, did not stir. "Ven the secon' torpedo come, the ship started to go fast. I vos knocked down. The captain, he say abandon ship. Ven I get up I shout. You do not answer. So I look. I find you on the hatch. I t'ink you dead, but I do not know. I shout to the others, but they do not hear. There is no time to go for someone. Then I t'ink of the pile of floats near the ship's side. I pull off the top one, and pull you on to it. The stern vos nearly under by then. I push the float clear and jump on. She bob up and down plenty until the sea get quiet again, but I hold you on tight."

"Thanks, Ivan," said Strang, in a tone that conveyed more than the simple expression. "I must have been thrown up against the cargo booms lying over the hatch."

He felt the top of his head, but snatched away his hand as the fingertips touched a raw gash. He peered around, still feeling dazed and sick.

"What happened to the boats? I don't see or hear anything of them." He shouted, but there came no answer.

"I do not know about them," said Ivan. "The submarine, she send up a flare; then fire machine-gun. I vos hit on my back. It knock me out. Ven I come to, I am lying across you, and all is dark and quiet."

"Why didn't you say something before?" cried Strang in distress. "Are you all right? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I am all right ven I lie like this. But my legs, I cannot move them."

Strang caught his breath. Paralyzed! And on a postage-stamp-sized float. It had no food or water or equipment. It was simply something for up to twenty persons to hang on to in the water while waiting to be picked up; it resembled a box mattress, canvas covered, with rope hand-grips all the way round.

On a sudden thought, Strang felt over Ivan's torso. It was naked. He now knew whence had come his pillow, doubtless made before Ivan was wounded. Strang groped for the bundle and placed it under Ivan's head.

"Lie quiet and take it easy," he said. "I'll keep a lookout. We'll soon be picked up. One thing," he added in an attempt at cheerfulness, "we won't freeze to death while we're waiting."

But, sitting with his hands clasped round his drawn-up knees, he was inclined to be gloomy with himself over the prospects of immediate rescue. He was in doubt whether the third operator had succeeded in making contact with ships or shore stations. The second operator had most likely sent an S O S on the motor lifeboat set, if he hadn't been killed by the machine-gun fire; but the boats had left the scene, and might be miles away when picked up; they had doubtless scattered in all directions when the submarine opened fire. If any of them decided to return to search for survivors, it would be difficult to find the spot in the dark. It really looked as if he and Ivan could hope for nothing before dawn.

At intervals he gazed round. Some ship might chance along. With most of the world's ships now stealing about like uneasy ghosts, he was not hopeful of seeing any lights; even if the unexpected happened, he had no flares or other means of attracting a passing vessel; but one might come close enough to be seen or heard, and hailed. One might also come close enough to cut them down, he also thought.

Occasionally Ivan spoke or winced; but presently he was silent. His heavy breathing reassured Strang that he was still alive, though whether asleep or unconscious from his wound, he could not tell. He felt desperately helpless at being unable to do anything for him.

The starry night seemed endless. Strang was continually changing his posture. He tried standing, to ease his cramped legs. In the flat calm there was scarcely any motion of the float; but he felt as unstable as a statue without a pedestal, and was soon on his haunches again.

Well into the night Ivan stirred, and he propped his chin on his hands, saying, "I vill look out. You sleep."

Strang was glad of the chance. More than once he had caught himself nodding, his head jerking up to the sudden fear of toppling overboard. It still had a dull ache, and he longed to rest it. He made a pillow of his own shirt and undershirt, and stretched out on his back. Both he and Ivan were just short of six feet, and so neither of them overlapped the float; for a better fit crosswise, they lay heads and tails.

It was light when Strang awoke. He sat up, feeling fresher; his headache had gone; Ivan was awake, his head pillowed on his bent arms, his face turned sideways. It was pallid under the black beard, and the blue eyes, usually lively, were listless.

Strang could now see his wound. It was near the small of his back, an ugly hole filled with clotted blood. There was a patch of it on the float.

"How're you feeling, Ivan?"

"T'irsty. I been t'irsty all night," Ivan said. "I eat salt fish for supper," he added ruefully.

The east was crimson with approaching sunrise. The sea was gray as yet, and as smooth and shiny as if gone over

with a flat-iron. A few pieces of wreckage here and there seemed as if inlaid. There was a great oil patch two or three hundred yards away, giving some idea of the distance the float had been washed from the sinking ship by the agitated waters.

And then, glancing over his shoulder, Strang saw the lifeboat. He pivoted on his knees, shouting, "Look, Ivan. The ship's motorboat!"

With its twin collapsible masts, now upright and a little antenna slung between, a cabin built into the bows, he had recognized the boat at a glance.

Ivan did not even raise his head. "I already see it. I do not see anybody in it."

Strang's first hasty thought had been that the lifeboat had returned to search for them. He now saw that she was motionless, and that there was a puzzling absence of any sign of life aboard.

"I wonder what became of her men," he muttered.

Ivan offered no conjecture. Strang judged the boat to be about six hundred yards away.

"I could swim that distance," he said eagerly.

He sat down at once and began to unlace his white shoes.

"No, no," said Ivan, raising his head in alarm. "I see shark."

"Where?" said Strang, looking round.

"I see him two t'ree time. You vatch."

It was several minutes before a black fin cut along the surface for a short length, between the lifeboat and the float, and then disappeared.

Strang was daunted. "Maybe we can paddle to the boat."

He lay flat and began to shove back the water with one hand. Ivan did his best on the other side. But in his weakened condition, it was a feeble best, and what movement the float made was more sidewise than ahead.

"It would take a week at this rate," Strang groaned. "We'll have to wait for the shark to leave."

The sun came out of the sea like a huge red bubble. And as the morning wore on, it seemed to be one of only two moving things in an immense stillness. The sea was as stagnant as a reservoir, and the few woolly clouds hung in the pale blue sky as if suddenly abandoned by all four winds. The other thing in motion was a black, wedge-shaped object that ploughed short white ridges.

No ships or plane intruded upon this vast tableau of sea and sky. As hunger and thirst began to trouble Strang, his eyes turned more often to the lifeboat. In it he and Ivan would find not only food and water and surgical supplies with which to dress their injuries, not only sleep without fear of rolling overboard, but, most of all, the means of summoning aid.

IN HIS fancy the boat became a lure set by the shark. The shark seemed in no hurry to leave. Strang had seen one or more of the monsters cruise for hours round a ship broken down or stopped for repairs in these island waters. This one seemed to hold the same expectation of garbage from the boat or the float. It seemed to be a lone prowler. For all he knew, he thought with a shudder, it might already have whetted its appetite on some poor devil who had failed to get away in the boats.

Occasionally it swam close enough to be seen whole, greenish-hued under the water, a baleful stare in the small eyes beyond the flattened snout.

After the sun had turned white hot, Strang and Ivan were forced to put on the garments that they were using as pillows. They had got away clad only in shirts and underwear, shoes and socks. These, soaked by the swirling water as the ship foundered, dried on their bodies. But Strang wet one of his socks and wrapped it round Ivan's throat in the hope of easing his fierce thirst.

"Ven I t'ink of all the beer I drink in San Juan," sighed Ivan.

"And when I think of the big supper I might have eaten last night if I'd been hungry," said Strang.

"It vould not be so bad if ve had a cigarette."

Most of the time Ivan lay face downward, his head resting on an arm; but occasionally he rolled on one side or the other; his useless legs swinging with his torso. He could not bear to lie on his wound. Strang wanted to make a soft pad and bandages of his own shirt, but Ivan would not hear of it.

"You vould get blistered in this sun. Do not vorry about me," he added wearily. "Maybe soon I roll off and give you more room."

"Don't talk like that, Ivan," said Strang sharply.

"Vot use for me to live?" asked Ivan dispiritedly. "I vill never valk again."

"You don't know for sure. The bullet may not have cut the spinal cord. It may only be pressing against it."

"I vish I could believe you vos right. I vould not vant life as a cripple, maybe crawl t'rough the streets begging. I have no von. I am alone."

"Ivan, you'll never have to beg as long as I can help it."

"You t'ink I do not know you have a vife and family to keep?" said Ivan, and laid his head down on his bent arm.

As the fierce sun crossed the zenith, Strang grew disheartened. There was still no sign of rescue. He was beginning to believe that no S O S had been picked up from the ship; nor from the little set in the motor lifeboat before she was strangely abandoned. If the other boats had met with a passing vessel, it had so far not meant anything to him and Ivan; if they were making for Porto Rico, it might take days to get there unless a breeze sprang up for the sails.

Unless he took the risk against the shark, he and Ivan might slowly die of hunger and thirst, if the sea didn't turn rough before then and wash them off. He was miserably hungry and thirsty now, yet he might hold out for days. But Ivan?

HE STOLE an uneasy look at Ivan. As he had already noticed, the skin under the black beard was a little flushed, the blue eyes brighter than usual. Ivan was undoubtedly developing a fever from his wound. He might go into a raving delirium. There was no room for a struggle on this snapshot-size float. The shark would perhaps have them both at one meal.

Toward mid-afternoon the world was set in motion again by a light breeze. Midget waves began to spill over the float, and the clouds were soon overtaking the sun.

During the dead calm, there had been no perceptible change in the distance separating boat and float. It was not long, however, before the greater effect of the wind on the boat became evident. Strang gave a little shout of dismay.

"Ivan, the boat's being blown away from us!"

Ivan lifted his head and looked for a moment; then laid it back on his arm. "Vy could not the vind have come from the other direction?" he complained.

Because their luck was out, thought Strang bitterly. His eyes remained fastened on the boat for some time in desperation. Suddenly, in a determined manner, he unbuckled his belt.

"Ivan, that boat's perhaps our only hope. It's up to me to try and reach it while there's still a chance."

Ivan looked up. "Vy you say that?"

"You saved my life last night, didn't you? Got yourself into this mess doing it, didn't you?"

"I tell you not to vorry about me. It make no difference vether I live or die."

"It might make a difference if I got to that boat and brought a plane to rush you to a hospital."

"You vould be only t'rowing your life away."

"I'll take a chance. I'll wait till the shark is a good way from the boat. Do a lot of splashing. I've heard it said that splashing will keep a shark off."

"The shark, he swim fast, and maybe too hungry to be scared away. You better off stay here and vait for ship to come."

"Ivan," said Strang. He sat beside him and began to slip out of his trousers. "I might last for a few days, but you wouldn't, and you know it. If I were saved after you'd gone, it would be on my conscience for the rest of my life. Another thing to remember is that if help didn't come, I'd die a horrible death of hunger and thirst, if I didn't go mad beforehand and jump into the sea. When I got near that stage, I might wish to heaven I'd taken this chance while I had it."

IVAN seemed to think this over. After a few moments he said, "Maybe vot you say is right. It is better for yourself that you take the chance. I did not vant you to do it for my sake."

He laid his head down again, seeming a little exhausted by the exchanges. Strang paused in the act of removing a shoe to stare at him. He was beginning to wonder if this was really the man who had once foolishly believed that a movie actress was crazy to meet him.

Together they watched for a sign of the shark. With the breeze now speckling the blue surface white, it was not easy to tell splashes made by the shark. The canvas cover of the float being too hot for thin shorts, Strang sat waiting on his trousers, tensed but still determined, wondering at what distance a shark could become aware of prey in the water.

After several minutes, Ivan spotted the fin, gliding along the surface about five hundred yards from the float. It lay in a direction that placed the float almost exactly in between boat and shark.

Nervously but without hesitation, Strang murmured a strained, "I'll be seeing you, Ivan," and slipped into the sea.

A dive would have given him a better start, but he thought it safer to go quietly, and he was also afraid of setting the blood flowing again from the gash on his head. The salt water stung the raw flesh like an acid. With his eyes now at surface level, the boat seemed farther away. He struck out with all his might. He was a skilful swimmer, and confident of his ability to reach the boat even at a fast pace. But, sacrificing some speed for protection, he flailed with arms and legs like a clumsy learner.

Now that he was exposed to the shark, his fear of it mounted almost to terror. He had ghastly visions of jaws closing over a limb, or round his body, and dragging him under. He had to fight a panicky impulse to race back to the float while there was yet time.

He lashed out even more fiercely in his struggle against instinct. His head was immersed more often than it was clear, and he gulped in mouthfuls of the warm water, spewing them out against the craving of his dried-up gullet. At intervals he snatched glimpses of the boat, to keep him on a straight course.

He safely covered what he estimated to be half the distance. But he was tiring sooner than he had expected. He was assailed by the fear that he would not last out. He was in no form for this swim. He was hungry and thirsty and lacked a good night's rest.

He couldn't turn back now. The float was just as far away as the boat. And he'd be swimming toward the shark. He wondered where it was. It might be near, about to dart at him.

He kicked out frantically. He swam for some time before looking up again. He was now close enough to see the stenciled figures of the boat's cubic capacity on the bow. It would have been a heartening sight if his strength were not failing

him. His speed had fallen off. Even a minute could mean too late.

His pounding heart seemed about to burst when finally he thrashed abreast of the boat's bow. But he did not stop. He could climb aboard more quickly from the low gunwale amidships. He grabbed at it with both hands.

Then came sudden terror. As he swung himself upward, one wet hand slipped. He fell back and plunged under. He thought himself at the mercy of the shark. Frantically he kicked himself to the surface. He clawed for the gunwale. And he shot upward with such force that he carried himself clean over the gunwale and pitched headlong between two thwarts.

AT THIS point in his story Strang drew a heavy breath. The terror of that swim had crept into his face. Henry Lowther, who had listened intent and silent throughout, waited for him to finish.

"It wasn't until I was landed here in Jacksonville this morning," Strang resumed, "that I got to know why the lifeboat had been abandoned. As soon as it was clear of the ship, the masts were put up, and the second operator began to send S O S, giving away the submarine's position. Probably that's why she opened fire. The radio set—luckily for me—wasn't damaged, but the second operator was badly wounded, with one or two others. The motor was put out of action, so the captain ordered the men into the other boats.

They cruised round for a while, shouting and looking for any men in the water or clinging to wreckage. In the dark they missed me and Ivan, and we were both unconscious at the time. Finally the boats pulled away, figuring that we'd gone down with the ship along with a few others. The submarine was still hanging around, and they were afraid she might open up again with the machine-gun. They made Porto Rico.

"But to get back to Ivan. As soon as I got my breath again in the boat, I sculled to the float. When I got near it, I think my heart must have stood still. All I could see on it was my shoes and trousers. Ivan was gone.

"There was a horrible frothy red patch close by. It turned me sick all over. It made me think of what I'd escaped. And I knew that what had happened to Ivan was no accident; the float wasn't unsteady enough to slide him off, even taking into consideration his poor helpless legs; and all the way round, about half an inch high and a few inches from the edges, was a rail to hang on to. Without any heroics, without so much as a hint before hand that he intended to do it, he deliberately rolled off the float.

"I don't suppose anyone will put up a monument to him," said Strang bleakly. "But long before I was picked up, I thought of you. During your cruise on the *Gladiolus,* you told me you intended putting out a book on modern true sea stories. I remembered that you lived here. So I looked up your name in the phone book as soon as I got the chance.

"I could have given the story to the reporters; but I was afraid that it might get nothing more than a page in some lurid Sunday supplement, to be used for wrapping paper afterward. I decided to say nothing about Ivan until I'd seen you first. If it isn't too late, there isn't anything I wouldn't do to see the story included in your book. It would go on library shelves, and Ivan would have something to his memory."

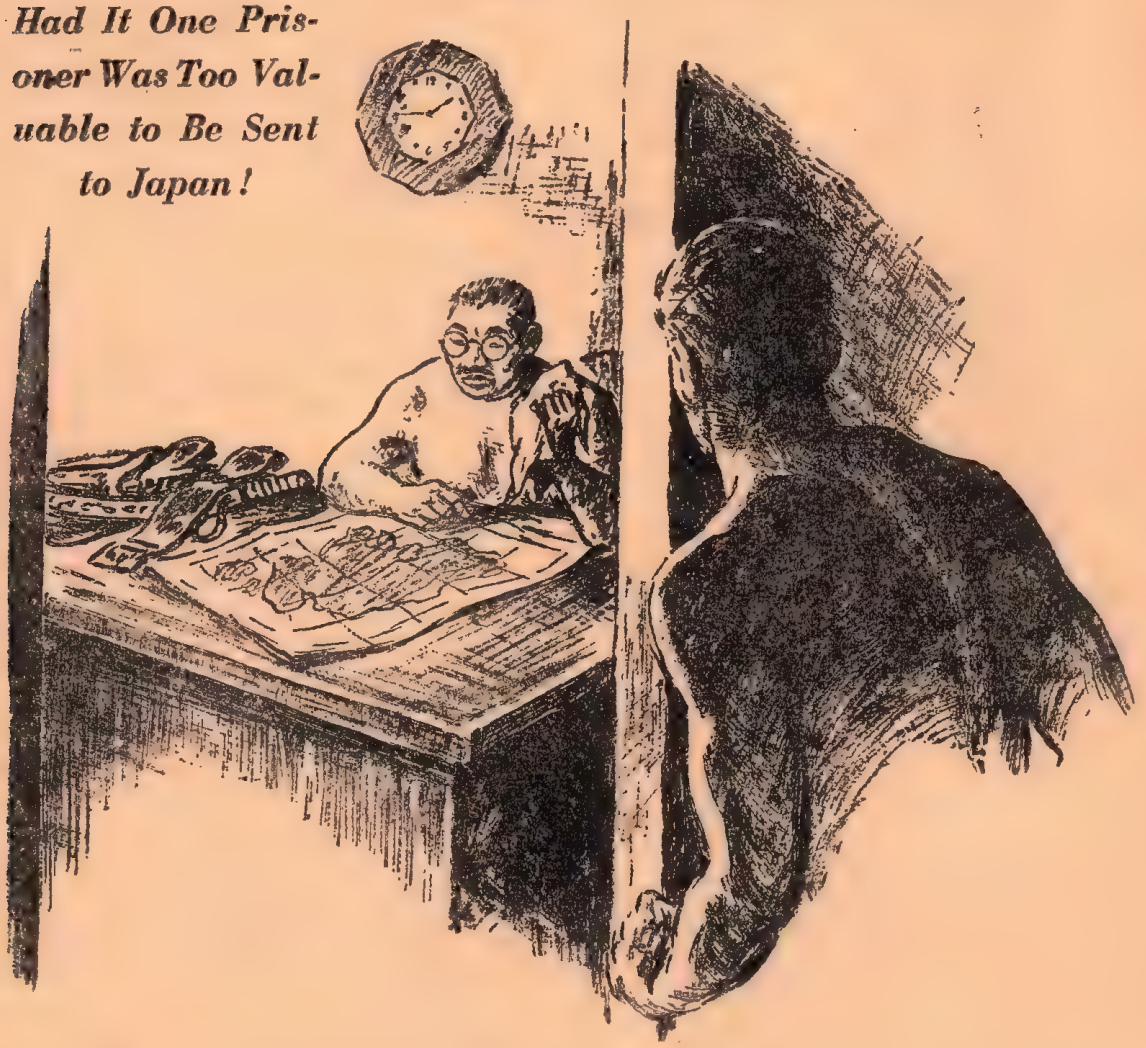
Strang gazed at Henry Lowther in earnest appeal. The other was slow to reply; but apparently not from any reluctance to agree, for when he spoke, it was to say: "No, it isn't too late. In fact," he added with a pleased smile, "I think I'll be able to pay a little tribute of my own to Ivan."

His publisher's next list of forthcoming books contained the following item: "Ivan, and Other True Tales of the Sea." By Henry Lowther.

A Rescue Party Heads into New Guinea — Rumor Had It One Prisoner Was Too Valuable to Be Sent to Japan!

By NEIL MARTIN

Author of "The Devil's Rendezous," etc.



APPOINTMENT IN SALAMOA

IT WAS a new experience for Frisco Ed McKinney to stand naked while another man applied a coat of dark brown stain to his muscular body. That was why he was inclined to joke with the big Stephens Island blackfellow, who was putting the finishing touches on McKinney's feet.

"Hope you didn't leave any holidays on my back, Chappie," McKinney bantered. "I don't want any white patches showing."

Bill Tuck, looking like the end man in a minstrel show, leaned his broad back against a tree and chuckled. "My word! Yer a dinkum painter, Chappie. Old Michael Angelo wasn't half up to you."

The black's thin lips stretched in a grin. He didn't understand more than half what was being said. But the two white men were pleased. Therefore, he was pleased. He turned McKinney about for Tuck's inspection and asked:

"Is good?"

Bill Tuck looked McKinney over with a critical eye. "I ain't much of a connyshoor when it comes to judgin' paintin's," he

drawled. "But I reckon it's good enough to fool the Japs in the dark, what?"

"That's all I want," McKinney said. "I don't aim to let 'em come close enough to criticize." He picked up a strip of cotton cloth from the ground and twisted it about his waist into a fair semblance of a native lava-lava. "Okay! What's next?"

Chappie patted his slim stomach. "Me *moolally.*"

"I never knew you to be any other way," McKinney retorted. "Well, I'm hungry, too. Let's eat."

He lifted their swag from the forks of a tree and unrolled the bundle on the ground, revealing their dwindling store of food.

"My word!" Tuck exclaimed. "Tilly's gettin' slim." He rubbed his too prominent stomach and added, "I can see where Little Mary's goin' to 'ave cause for complaint before we get back to our camp on the Wussi."

McKinney passed him a half-pound tin of bully beef. "It'll do you good to lose some of that blubber. You're too damn fat as it is."

He handed the black a tin of meat, took one for himself, then opened the tea canister and carefully measured out three pinches of dry tea leaves on a scrap of paper.

"Tea is served, gents," he grinned.

Tuck balanced the open tin on the palm of his right hand and regarded its contents with a frown of distaste. "Harriet Lane two meals in succession!" he growled resentfully. "Y'know, Yank, if I wanted to punish a bloke, I'd force him to scoff a tin o' this bloody railway accident three times a day for a week. I couldn't think of anything worse than that. My word, no!"

"Hush, dear, and eat your spinach!" McKinney mocked.

He attacked his own tin of meat none too heartily, all the time fighting back a desire to laugh at his partner's appearance. Tuck was just short of five feet five, immensely broad of shoulder, with arms like the forelegs of a horse and legs like newel posts.

His bulbous nose was like a misshapen tomato in the middle of his rubicund face, which was further embellished with a week-old bristle of fiery red beard and two short, thick eyebrows that projected like little red awnings above his mild, brown eyes. The top of his head was bald, and glistened with a pinkish sheen, even under the coat of stain, and was surrounded with a halo of coppery hair that stuck up in little tufts above his ears.

McKINNEY realized that his own appearance must border on the ridiculous. For one thing, his steely, blue eyes didn't go with a make-up like this, and his face, hard-bitten though it was, had nothing Australoid about it. It was only a sort of camouflage which he hoped would help them accomplish the task which lay before them.

"Christopher!" he thought, "if the gang back in Port Kennedy could see us now, we'd never hear the end of it."

Tuck speared a piece of meat and popped it into his mouth. "Y'know, Yank," he said reflectively, "Harriet Lane is all right in its place. Take a couple o' tins like these, add the same amount o' turtle meat cut up in little squares, a few pound o' spuds, an onion or two, an' a Cornishman rolled flat an' set on top o' the mess to steam. My word!" He brightened. "There's a feed for you—hoodle. Dinkum tucker, me lad!"

McKinney frowned; it was like Bill Tuck to talk about the unattainable.

"Gee!" McKinney growled. "Why bring that up now?"

The Queenslander grinned. "An' a bloody good billy o' scald to wash it down, what?"

"Aw, hell!" McKinney protested. He passed the remains of his tin of meat to Chappie, who seized it eagerly. "Don't you ever think about anything but grub?"

"There ain't much else to think about

when a bloke is forced to eat stuff what tastes like stewed rope yarns three times hand runnin'." Tuck grinned. He tossed his empty tin among the undergrowth, picked one of the portions of tea from the paper and popped the dry leaves into his mouth. Then he leaned back against the tree, closed his eyes and chewed reflectively.

McKinney followed his example, except that he didn't close his eyes. Instead, he sat there, chewing his portion of tea leaves and watching a pair of goura pigeons on a branch above his head. The birds stared back at him with ruby red eyes, and he noted their plump breasts, then looked past them at other toothsome delicacies disporting themselves among the branches of the trees that ringed the clearing. It was tough to be forced to eat dry, unappetizing bully beef when the trees were alive with goura pigeons, cockatoos and raffali squirrels. But they were as far out of his reach as if they were on the moon, for he dared not start a cooking fire—not with several thousand Japanese within a stone's throw.

He watched Chappie gather up their discarded clothing, roll them in the swag and stow the bundle in a convenient tree crotch.

The big black, he realized, was worth his weight in gold. Without Chappie, he and Tuck would be almost helpless in this New Guinea wilderness.

From where he sat, McKinney could look down the tree-clad hillside toward the little town of Salamoa squatting on the low neck of land between the mainland and the tree-covered peninsula. It wasn't much of a place—the Administration Building, a few galvanized iron stores, the radio station and the airdrome which once had furnished service to the Morobe gold fields on the other side of the mountains. Now the Rising Sun flag was drooping from the tall staff before the Administration Building, and the unpaved streets swarmed with Japanese, soldiers, sailors and marines. In the harbor on the western side of the peninsula four destroyers, an aircraft carrier and a couple of submarine tenders lay at anchor. A small formation of Zero fighters roared up the Huon Gulf from seaward, soaring high above Burnung Point, where the cylindrical tower of the light gleamed white against the tree-clad background.

McKinney hurled a curse at the little fighter planes. Months had passed since the attack on Pearl Harbor, and nothing, apparently, had been done to halt the southward sweep of the Japanese. He snatched a pair of binoculars from the ground and followed the planes as they roared toward Lae, eighteen miles distant. From where he sat, he could discern the white buildings of the mission station on the bluff, and the flagstaff of Government House on Cape Arkona, and beyond the six-hundred-foot saddle-topped hill with its crowning, lone tree—"the big tree of Lae," the coast's most conspicuous landmark—which some day, he hoped, would be a pointing finger to guide Allied bombers toward the Jap landing field. He hoped it would be soon.

He swung the glasses toward Salamoa and studied the buildings in the vicinity of Government House, now Japanese headquarters. He wondered if Tom Ridgeley were still there, a prisoner, or if he had been shipped to some concentration camp in Japan. If Ridgeley were still being held in the town, McKinney had hopes of accomplishing his mission. If the man had been sent away with the other internees, then the hardships undergone by himself and Tuck since the seaplane had landed them at Mopi Village, on the Ipori River, four days of arduous travel across the jungle-clad mountains, had been in vain.

TOM RIDGELEY, once chief radioman at Salamoa, was credited with being in possession of technical knowledge that might alter the course of the war. Even before the Japs had descended like a plague of locusts upon the eastern coast of New Guinea, Ridgeley's experiments had been

known to their spies. Now he was a prisoner in their hands.

In various ways rumors had drifted south to Port Kennedy that Tom Ridgeley, instead of being shipped to Japan, was being held in Salamoa and subjected to daily torture.

The government had protested, but that was all the government could do, with Australia in danger of invasion.

To the old Thursday Island hands, of which select organization Tom Ridgeley was a respected member, it seemed as though the brass hats had abandoned Tom to his fate. Something, they declared, must be done about it. Something was. McKinney and Tuck, as the two members most familiar with the country between the Mambare and the Huon Gulf, volunteered to make the attempt to rescue Tom Ridgeley from the Japs.

The rest of the old hands co-operated in the furnishing of a seaplane, which carried McKinney, Tuck and Chappie, whose tribal name was Kurang, the Tiger Snake, to Mambare Bay and up the Ipori River to the rapids, eighteen miles upstream. There the plane had left them, the pilot promising to return in ten days.

Recruiting half a dozen bearers at Mopi Village, on the Ipori, McKinney and his companions had struck out across the mountains toward the northwest, heading into country seldom visited by white men, a land of savage, jungle-clad hills, whose inhabitants were disposed to regard all strangers as so much nourishment on the hoof. For four days they had alternately scrambled and hacked their way across country, finally coming out of the brush on the northern side of the range, where it slopes toward the Huon Gulf. Making a permanent camp on a hill above the swift-flowing Wussi River, McKinney had left their supplies in charge of the Mopi head man. Then he and Tuck and Chappie had pushed east toward the sea. Now they were in sight of their goal, awaiting the coming of midnight to make the attempt to snatch Tom Ridgeley from under the nose of the local Japanese command.

CLOSE to midnight, McKinney was aroused by Chappie. Tuck was already awake, and was draping a lava-lava about his waist, over his belted Webley. For a while after sundown, a new moon had hovered above the western horizon. Now it was gone, leaving behind the hot blackness of a moonless tropic night.

McKinney shook himself fully awake, stripped off his loin cloth and buckled his pistol-belt about his waist. Resuming his scanty garment, he wrapped a couple of hand grenades in the folds of the cloth.

During the long afternoon they had made their plans. Now, as they left the clearing, McKinney recapitulated: "Remember to keep an interval of about a hundred feet between the three of us. Also, if we're challenged, we scatter and beat it back here. We can't fight the Jap army."

Chappie took the lead and moved confidently ahead, following with unerring instinct in the inky darkness beneath the trees some faint jungle path that wound erratically down the slope in the direction of the town. McKinney followed a hundred feet behind the black. Bill Tuck floundered along a hundred feet behind the American, making more noise than a bull elephant on a rampage.

"Damn!" McKinney swore as he listened to the racket behind him. "Old Bill's making more noise than a twenty-ton tank going over a junkpile."

He was being hard put to keep Chappie in sight, for the black's tall figure seemed to merge with the surrounding gloom. More by instinct than anything else, he felt his way along the narrow trail. They passed through a native garden deep in the jungle, came out of the jungle and crept in single file between the orderly tree rows of an abandoned rubber plantation, past the ruined house of the overseer and the burned-out labor quarters, then rows of blackened piles which once had been a na-

tive village. Then they were in jungle again, moving in single file along a native runway that meandered through the mangroves bordering the shore. Suddenly McKinney halted. Chappie was standing before him, the whites of his eyes showing in the darkness.

"Two Japfella!" the tall abo whispered excitedly, pointing into the darkness ahead.

McKinney started as Bill Tuck blundered into him from behind.

"What now?" the Queenslander wheezed.

The black gestured to enjoin silence and whispered something in his native dialect. Tuck nudged McKinney with his elbow and translated:

"He says there are a couple of Japs up ahead, guardin' a lot o' boxes."

"I'm going to give 'em a look over," McKinney declared, starting ahead.

"Keep yer bloody shirt on," Tuck admonished. "Let Chappie go ahead o' you. *Whurra!*" He motioned to the black to go ahead.

McKinney followed Chappie for about a hundred yards, then was brought to a halt by the pressure of the black's hand on his arm. Without speaking, Chappie pointed into the darkness.

Peering into the gloom, McKinney was, more than ever, aware of Chappie's worth. Lacking the black's guidance, he and Tuck must inevitably have blundered into trouble. For there, standing in the middle of the narrow path among the mangroves, his short, stocky figure an indistinct blur in the darkness, was a Japanese soldier.

A few yards away a second Jap was leaning carelessly against the front of what seemed to be a great mound of boxes covered with tarpaulins. Overhead, the branches of the mangroves were interlaced, shutting out the feeble light of the few stars that showed through the monsoon haze, giving the place the appearance of a tunnel. Pressing Chappie's arm, McKinney backed away.

When they rejoined Tuck, McKinney reported: "That's an ammunition dump up ahead, and a right sizeable one, apparently. We'll have to find a way around it."

"Keep yer hair on," Tuck said. "I want to think a bit." He sat down on a convenient log and wrinkled his forehead in concentration. Presently he looked up at McKinney and said, "We'd be bloody fools to leave that dump intact, what?"

"We'd be bigger fools to mess with it now, seeing we've got Tom Ridgeley to worry about," McKinney argued. "Tom's welfare comes before everything else."

"Aye, I know that bloody well," Tuck wheezed. "But if you two blokes should get into a shivoo with them Nips, this 'ere dump lettin' go might keep you from havin' to drop the bundle."

"It's an idea, all right," McKinney admitted thoughtfully. "But how d'you figure to set it off?"

"Gimme them two iron eggs," Tuck said. "I remember in Mespot, back in the old war—"

"Here," McKinney passed him the two hand grenades. "Let's hear your plans—if you have any—and we'll be pushing on."

"Well, it's simple enough, as you might say. You an' Chappie go ahead. If you can find Tom an' get him without runnin' foul 'o the Nips, well an' good. You come back 'ere, savvy. Then we peg in the handballs an' hop the twig. But if you should run into a shivoo, you'll be forced to do a bit o' shootin'. As soon as I hear guns goin' off, I'll do my stuff, what?"

"Okay, if you don't blow yourself up along with the dump," McKinney grumbled.

The Queenslander chuckled softly. "Have you ever blown up an ammunition dump?" he quizzed.

"No."

"Well, I have," Tuck declared. "All I need now is to find a safe place to work from. An' I'll find that, never you fear. Now you get ahead with your job. I'll

meet you back at the place where we left our swag."

"Okay, Bill!" McKinney squeezed the other's muscular shoulder. "Good luck!"

He followed Chappie inland again, away from the path. They clambered over the arching roots of the mangroves and finally came out on solid ground, climbed a low hill and then saw the water of the harbor shimmering darkly below.

Half an hour later they came out on the beach and turned left toward the town. Before them, Salamoa lay silent and dark. Not a light showed. Even the native village on the peninsula beyond was wrapped in darkness.

As they reached the low, swampy neck over which the town straggled, mosquitoes descended upon them in a whining, bloodthirsty horde. So far, they had encountered few of the pests. Now McKinney found himself covered from neck to heels.

He swore. "This is the cock-eyed limit. What a hell of a place for a town!"

Chappie was more practical. Breaking a leafy twig from a bush, he fanned the pests from his naked torso. McKinney followed his example, aware that the mosquitoes were, after all, an unmixed blessing, for they kept the Japs indoors.

"If they've got as much sense as God gave wallabies," McKinney told himself, as he followed the black through the silent streets, "that's where they'd be in a burg like this."

BECAUSE of the Japanese soldier's noisy progress, McKinney and Chappie were able to avoid the single patrol they encountered as they penetrated deeper into the town. Twice they circled about gun emplacements, where harassed soldiers crouched for protection from the hungry mosquitoes in the smoke of tiny smudge fires. Having spent most of the afternoon in observing the place, McKinney knew that the few buildings had been turned into billets, that the natives were gone, fleeing from the threat of enforced labor to their obscure villages in the back bush. So far, he had seen but few of the enemy. But he knew that the first alarm would bring them swarming from their billets like wasps from a disturbed nest.

Reaching the center of town, McKinney and the black halted in the shadow of a tree across the narrow, unpaved street from the Administration Building, where two sentries patrolled beats on opposite sides, their movements timed to bring them in sight of each other at the corners. They wore green mosquito veils over their tin hats, and each man carried a whisk of grass in his free hand. They were having troubles of their own, McKinney realized, as he watched the nearest man march past with his short-legged, coolie stride, plying his whisk vigorously to knock the stinging pests from his body. Studying their movements, he saw that he would have little difficulty in entering the building. Getting out, however, was another matter.

He turned to Chappie and whispered, "I'm going to try getting inside. You stick here, and keep that gun in your belt unless you're challenged. If you hear shooting inside, it'll mean they've discovered me. If the shooting stops, and I don't come out, you leg it back to Bill. Savvy?"

"Savvy too much!" Chappie pouted. "Japfella shoot, me no go 'way. Me come inside, shoot plenty." He placed a finger on his massive chest and added, "Me bloody good shot!"

McKinney chuckled. "Okay! Have it your own way. I'm off."

MCKINNEY watched the sentry on his side of the building reach the end of his beat, make an about-face and start back toward the other corner. Waiting until the soldier had passed, he crouched low and darted across the street. With his eyes still fastened on the sentry's back, he crawled up on the veranda and lay flat on the boards.

Lying there, he studied his surroundings. On this side of the building were sev-

eral windows which he knew reached from floor to ceiling. There was a single door halfway along the veranda, and this he knew opened into a room which in turn gave on to a corridor running the length of the west wing. A similar corridor ran through the east wing, while a third reached from the entrance hall in front of the building to the rear, all three combining to form a T. Having been in the building a few years before, when it was still the office and residence of the administrator, he was familiar with every part of it.

If Tom Ridgeley were still being held a prisoner in the building, McKinney reasoned that he would be confined in the servants' quarters, as the Japs would take all the best rooms for themselves. Ridgeley being an important capture, it was more than likely that he would be held close to headquarters, where the Japs could keep an eye on him, and where he would be more readily available for questioning.

As the sentry marched past for the fourth time since he had gained the veranda, McKinney drew his automatic and crept on hands and knees to the door. He tried the knob, heard the faint click of the lock, felt the panel give. With a final glance toward the retreating sentry, he pushed open the door about eighteen inches and slipped noiselessly through. Closing the door softly, he peered about him in the darkness, instantly aware that he had blundered.

For more than five minutes he stood there, his eardrums assailed by the snores of sleeping men, his nostrils clogged by an overpowering odor of Jap, which suggests a blend of strong, hot tea, rancid peanut oil and stale fried fish. As his vision conditioned itself to the darkness, he saw twelve men stretched on the floor, all stark naked, each man's equipment lying beside him in a neat pile. Across the room, a thread of light close to the floor indicated the presence of the door opening on the hallway. A shadow passing before the strip of light, momentarily obscuring it, warned him that someone was moving about on the other side of the panel.

Opening the outer door an inch or two, he peered outside and saw the sentry march past, heading toward the west corner, where he would make his about-face and start back toward the front of the building. There was no chance for him to get out of the room now, McKinney saw, for in another second or two the soldier would be facing him.

McKinney swiftly closed the door and whirled about as the knob of the inner door rattled sharply. Stepping softly as a cat, he flitted between the rows of sleeping men and crouched to one side of the opening. Then the panel swung inward, admitting a rectangle of light from a gasoline lantern in the corridor, against which the short, stocky figure of a man stood outlined like a black silhouette.

The newcomer was clad only in a kimona, which fell open in front. In his right hand he held a flashlight. As McKinney watched, he raised the electric torch, and his left hand fumbled with the switch.

Aware that he was teetering on the brink of disaster, McKinney lashed out with his gun. The barrel of the weapon thudded softly against the angle of the man's jaw, and his knees started to give. Before he could fall, McKinney snatched the flashlight from his hand, caught him about the waist and jerked him out of the light. Giving him another rap for good measure, he lowered him to the floor. Then he closed the door and waited, his nerves taut as fiddlestrings.

Nothing happened. One of the sleepers muttered in his sleep; another changed position. That was all. Feeling that a miracle had been worked in his favor, McKinney opened the door, glanced quickly along the empty passage, stepped across the threshold and drew the door softly behind him.

He turned left, tiptoed along the pas-

sage and halted again at the junction of the west corridor and the entrance hall, on the farther side of which a door stood open, giving him a view of the Administrator's office, where a portly, middle-aged Japanese, clad only in a pair of shorts, sat at a desk and studied a map, pausing at intervals to mop his streaming face with a towel. The hands of the octagon-faced wall clock above his head pointed to a quarter of two.

Aware of the danger of staring too long at another person, McKinney drew back around the angle of the corridor and pondered his next move. The servants' quarters were in the east wing. But to reach the east corridor he must cross the entrance hall, directly under the eyes of the man at the desk. Poking his head around the angle again, McKinney peered through the open doorway at the sweating Jap. On one side of the desk lay a Sam Browne belt, to which was buckled a Samurai sword with a carved ivory scabbard, and a holster containing an automatic pistol. Immediately, McKinney discarded the idea of attacking the man. Because of the Jap's position at the desk, it would be impossible to take him by surprise. McKinney withdrew his head and swore feelingly.

In the office across the hall a swivel chair creaked. Venturing once more to peer around the angle, McKinney saw that the Jap had risen from his seat and was now standing before the safe, a roll of paper in his left hand. As McKinney watched, the man stooped, reached his right hand toward the combination knob, presenting his short, broad back to the American.

With a surge of elation, McKinney crossed the hall in half a dozen cat-like strides. Padding silently along the east corridor, he halted below the gasoline lantern hanging from a hook in the ceiling. He reached upward, unhooked the lantern and shut off the gas, aware that light, at that moment, was a superfluous blessing.

Replacing the lantern on its hook, he went on to the end of the corridor, paused before the last door and tried the knob. The lock clicked softly, and the panel swung inward for about a foot. From the inner darkness there came a squeak of bedsprings and a querulous challenge in Japanese. With his heart in his throat, McKinney closed the door, stationed himself to one side of the casing, his pistol balanced in his right hand.

He waited, his nerves taut; nothing happened. At last, satisfied that the occupant of the room had gone back to sleep, he tried the door across the passage. His left hand groped for the knob and twisted to the left. The lock rattled softly, but the door held fast. Then his knuckles came in contact with the end of the key.

"This is more like it!" he muttered elatedly.

The key turned in the lock with an explosive kick that sounded like a pistol shot in the silent corridor. Opening the door about an inch, McKinney listened. No sound came from within the room.

Somewhere within the building, a door banged open with a noise like a cannon shot. Startled, McKinney peered along the passage. Beyond the entrance hall, a man was staggering along the west corridor toward the front of the building, holding his hands to his head and weaving to and fro as if he were drunk. As McKinney watched, the other fell, crawled for several yards on hands and knees, rose shakily and stumbled onward, his kimono swirling about his bare legs. McKinney swore as he recognized the man whom he had knocked out less than ten minutes before.

"Christopher!" McKinney muttered. "I figured that guy was out of the way for at least half an hour. He must have a head like a rock."

Filled with dismay, he watched the Jap stumble across the entrance hall toward the office. He doubted if the man really knew what had happened. Possibly he would invent a story to save his face. In

any case, there would be an alarm, probably a search of the building. That fat fellow in the office didn't look like a man who'd take things for granted.

Opening the door wider, McKinney slipped into the room. He removed the key, closed the door and locked it on the inside. He waited, his forefinger tense on the trigger of his automatic, his thumb upon the switch button of the flashlight in his left hand. Gradually, objects in the room took shape, and he saw in one corner a narrow iron bed upon which a man was lying in a position which indicated that his wrists and ankles were fastened to the end posts.

"Hope to Christopher they didn't use irons," McKinney prayed, dismayed at the thought of such a possibility. He stepped to the bed, ran an exploring hand over one of the foot posts and started in sudden elation as his fingertips came in contact with a turn of stiff Manila line.

Switching on the flashlight, he looked down at the man on the bed. It was Ridgeley, all right, but a Ridgeley whom McKinney would have recognized with difficulty had they met under other circumstances. For one thing, the man was stark naked. His tall angular figure was covered with bruises from head to foot, and his face was almost hidden behind a dense mat of blond beard. Half-blinded by the flashlight, he blinked up at McKinney and grunted defiantly:

"What d'you want now, you lousy little rat?"

"Wrong number, Tom," McKinney whispered. "This is Ed McKinney, from Thursday Island." As he spoke, he drew his sheath knife and cut through the turns of line securing Ridgeley's wrists and ankles. "Can you travel?"

Ridgeley heaved himself painfully to a sitting posture on the edge of the bed and then pitched to his knees on the floor. He put out his hands, pawed at McKinney, as if unwilling to believe the evidence of his eyes.

"God, Mac!" he exclaimed. "Is it really you?"

"Listen, Tom," McKinney warned. "We haven't got any time for talk." He paused to listen to the growing hubbub in the front of the building, and then added, "Right now we've got to scram. Can you navigate?"

Ridgeley dragged himself erect, swayed dizzily and collapsed on the bed. "Can't make it, I'm afraid. I've been lying in one position for forty-eight hours. Cripes! I'm all pins and needles."

"Work your arms and legs and it'll go away," McKinney advised. He stepped to the door and listened. The commotion up front had died down, and the building was silent once more. Relieved, he stepped back to Ridgeley and said, "Seems like they've quieted down."

"God, Mac," Ridgeley groaned, working his arms furiously, "I always figured you were a little bit off your top. But you've earned the bloody biscuit this time. Better hop it while there's a chance. You can't do anything for me."

"Go ahead—shake up the old circulation," McKinney advised stonily. "You'll feel better after a while." To keep the other interested, he asked, "Why didn't they send you to Japan?"

"Because Yamasato thought I had something he could use," the other spat. "The fat little swine's been working me over every day or so. But he gained nothing by it." He stood up, kicked one leg, then the other. "Cripes! I feel better already. I believe I can make it, Mac."

"Fine! Who's this Yamasato?"

"Nip intelligence — ranks colonel," Ridgeley went on working his arms and legs. "Rotten swine."

"He's only one among many, I reckon," McKinney drawled. "How are you feeling now?"

"Great! How did you get here?"

"Seaplane up from Port Kennedy to the rapids of the Ipori. From there across the mountains to the Wussi."

Ridgeley stopped his exertions and sat down on the edge of the bed, breathing hard. "Just yourself?" he probed.

"Bill Tuck and his boy, Chappie, are with me," McKinney told him.

HE STARTED, peered toward the door, suddenly aware that the knob had rattled. He hissed warningly at Ridgeley, stepped to the window and drew aside the blackout screen. A soldier was standing on the veranda, his rifle trained from the hip.

McKinney stepped back from the window. In the stillness of the room, Ridgeley's rapid breathing sounded like the noise of a motor exhaust.

"What is it?" Ridgeley asked.

Then, from the corridor, someone challenged:

"Ritchery!"

After an interval, Ridgeley answered querulously: "What the hell do you want?" He looked at McKinney and muttered, "Yamasato—swine!"

"Who inside with you, Ritchery?"

"No one," the Australian snapped. "Get to hell away from that door and let a bloke get some sleep!"

"Someone inside with you, Ritchery," Yamasato insisted. "Open door. I must seeing."

"How the bloody hell can I open the door, when you've got me lashed down?" Ridgeley bawled.

"Ah, yiss! Not believing you secure now. Open door!" He added a snarling command in Japanese. The blackout screen on the window fell with a rustle to the floor as a pane of glass crashed inward before the thrust of a rifle muzzle.

"Cripes!" Ridgeley groaned. "We're sunk!"

"A guy's never sunk as long as he can kick hard enough to keep himself afloat," McKinney drawled.

He whirled about to face the door, as the panel crashed inward and the tubby figure of Colonel Yamasato stepped confidently across the threshold. He had buckled on his Sam Browne belt, and now carried his naked sword in his right hand, while the automatic in his left jerked up to the level of his shoulder as he caught sight of McKinney. Behind him, half a dozen soldiers, all stark naked, crowded through the doorway, their bayoneted rifles pointing to the front.

McKINNEY lost no time in argument. He brought up his pistol, slack armed, pressed the trigger and planted a bullet neatly between Yamasato's eyes. As the tubby colonel pitched forward on his face, McKinney continued to fire into the press of yellow bodies jamming the doorway. Three of the men crashed to the floor. The others backed hastily from the room, firing from the hip, without any more effect than to bring showers of plaster from the ceiling.

Vaguely aware that Ridgeley had snatched up the colonel's pistol and was now blazing away, McKinney saw the three remaining men go down in the corridor like grain before the sickle. A shot sounded from the veranda, and the sentry outside tumbled head-foremost into the room amid a shower of glass. Then Chappie bounded into the room over the body of the soldier.

"Hah!" he exclaimed. *"Ganto bon tura!"*

"Good boy!" McKinney nodded. "You got him, all right."

He sprang to the door and looked around the casing. Half a dozen more Japs were advancing along the corridor. Somewhere in the town a bugle shrilled the assembly. Poking his automatic around the door jamb, McKinney raked the forefront of the oncoming soldiers with lead. Two men went down. The others backed toward the angle of the hallway, keeping up a ragged fire.

McKinney stooped, dragged the body of the colonel out of the doorway. Seizing the foot of the bed, he dragged it across

the room, then closed the door and placed the bed across it. He snatched the colonel's sword from his limp grasp, cut the sling straps and thrust the blade back in the scabbard.

"I always wanted one of those things," he declared, starting toward the wrecked window. "Come on, fellas!" He shoved the sword inside his girdle and sprang off the veranda, with Ridgeley and Chappie at his heels.

All over the town, Japs were pouring into the streets. The sentry from the opposite side of the building came pounding around the corner. Ridgeley dropped him with a shot.

"Take to the beach!" he ordered. "We can't get back through the town."

McKinney was already aware of the situation. To their right, rifles flashed in the darkness, and bullets whined above their heads. A squad of Japs came racing toward them, firing from the hip as they advanced.

Suddenly the ground quivered. Then a thunderous explosion rent the air. The sky to westward of the town flared red. A shell streaked overhead with a curious quivering groan and fell into the harbor. Then there came the chattering explosion of small ammunition.

Thrown to the earth, half stunned by the awful concussion, McKinney pushed himself to his hands and knees and looked about him for his companions. Chappie was already on his feet, and Ridgeley was scrambling up. Over to their right, the Japs were milling like bewildered cattle.

"Come on!" McKinney snapped, springing erect. "Get moving!"

Led by Chappie, they raced toward the beach, gained the shelving strip of sand and followed the water. Behind them, an antiaircraft gun let go. Searchlights from the warships in the harbor cut white paths across the sky. Half a mile from the town, McKinney paused to look over his shoulder. There was no more pursuit. Suddenly he wanted to laugh.

"Slow down," he panted. "Think you can find the way back to our camp, Chappie?"

"Can do," the black declared confidently. He pointed with his pistol toward the spitting red glare above the treetops a mile away to their right and grinned, "Billtuck make'm *burla gweeun.*"

"What's this about Bill Tuck making plenty fire?" Ridgeley wanted to know. "What the hell happened, anyway?"

McKinney told him of Tuck's plan to blow up the ammunition dump. Ridgeley chuckled.

"Seems as if he'd chosen the psychological moment, what?"

"It was a big help to us, all right," McKinney said. "But I'm worried for fear he might have blown himself up with it."

They followed Chappie off the beach and scrambled after him through a strip of mangroves to dry, level ground, through a cocoanut grove and then through more jungle.

Presently they were going uphill, treading in single file along a narrow path. For an hour they straggled on, up one hill and down another, sometimes fighting their way through strips of jungle, with the racket of the still exploding dump sounding faintly to their right. As they gained the crest of a hill, McKinney looked toward the northeast, where the sky glowed like molten copper.

"I hope to Christopher you know where you're going, Chappie," he said. "We're miles away from Salamoa now."

"We go 'long place Billtuck him stop," the black declared confidently.

They scrambled down the hill, threaded their way through a narrow valley and across an abandoned native garden which, even in the darkness, seemed familiar to McKinney. Now he realized that the black had been leading them in a roundabout way to their rendezvous, traveling entirely by instinct, like a homing pigeon.

They went on for another mile. Then Chappie led the way uphill, pushed

through a grove of trees into a small clearing and halted.

"Billtuck," he announced.

"Bloody near time you blokes got 'ere," Tuck wheezed from the darkness. He was sitting with his back to a tree, conveying the contents of an open tin of bully beef to his mouth with the point of his knife. "How did you make out, Yank?"

"Mission carried out with success," McKinney reported. "Here's Tom."

Tuck waved a greeting with the half empty tin. "How are you, Tom? Hope I see you well, what?"

"Pretty well—thanks to Mac and you," Ridgeley said. "Mac's been worrying for fear you'd blown yourself up with the dump."

"No bloody fear!" Tuck laughed. "I just worked back a ways an' found where the dump came up against a bit of a hill. So I went around the hill, climbed to the top an' chucked down the eggs. Then I rolled back downhill out o' harm's way. Wasn't it a ding-dong shivoo, now?"

"Some party, all right," McKinney admitted. "Coming when it did, it probably saved our bacon. I'll bet the golliwogs are still running around in circles."

"What's to do now?" Tuck asked.

"We're getting out of here," McKinney told him. He pulled their swag out of the tree crotch, unrolled the bundle and distributed the remaining tins of meat among the others. "No use bothering about our duds—we've got plenty where we're going. Besides, if we put on clothes, we'd only embarrass Tom. Let's scram; we've got to be long gone from here before sun-up."

TWO days later they were back at their camp on the Wussi. Their flight inland had been uneventful. They had seen no more Japs, for they had swung far to southward of Lae for fear of meeting with enemy patrols working east through the Markham Valley. Now they were rested, their outfit packed and ready to resume their journey across the mountains to the Ipori.

Bill Tuck, attired once more as a white man, although neither he nor McKinney had bothered to remove the stain from their bodies, was seated before a hissing Primus stove, stirring the savory contents of a pot. Beside him, on a square of clean, white oilcloth, lay a "Cornishman," a dumpling flattened and rounded to the shape of a thin cake. Ridgeley, seemingly none the worse for his experiences, was seated with McKinney in the shade of a tree, examining the sword which McKinney had taken from Colonel Yamasato.

"It's a prize, all right," Ridgeley was saying. "A genuine samurai, if I'm any judge. Probably hundreds of years old." He sheathed the weapon and laid it on the ground beside him. "I envy you, Mac. I'd cheerfully give a year of my life to have got that little fat swine."

"What did you know to make him treat you that way?" McKinney asked.

Ridgeley grinned. "Know anything about radio, Mac?"

"Very little," McKinney admitted.

"Then," Ridgeley said, "I'll have to try and explain in every-day language. First of all, I'd found a way to wreck every radio within a radius of a mile. Later, I developed it further and found that I had a boomerang. You see, I had the power to cause a sort of minor earthquake everywhere there was a radio in operation for a distance of about a mile. The damned thing has potentialities, all right, if only it could be controlled.

"In other words, you'd have to invent another gadget to keep it from running wild," McKinney smiled.

"Exactly!" Ridgeley nodded. "I hadn't made any secret of it—lots of folks in Salamoa knew about my experiments. And the Jap spies knew about them, too. So when the Nips took over, they threw me in the clink, instead of shipping me off to Japan. That's when my trouble started."

"If the gadget was no good, as you say,"

McKinney said, "why didn't you let 'em have it? They wouldn't have got any further with it."

"That's probably true. But they might have turned it over to their fellow Aryans in Germany. That was the danger, for the Fritizies might perfect it to such a degree that they could wreck every Allied ship and plane—everywhere there was a radio, in fact. That's why I couldn't afford to let go. Even now, I'm not sure it's worth a damn. However, I'll turn it over to your people and let them monkey with it."

They fell silent, watching Chappie a few yards away. The big black was carving a slab of native wood, making a "talking stick," doubtless a recital of his exploits the night before, something to be hung in the communal house on Stephens Island, the tribal hall of fame. As he worked, he sang softly. Then he paused, cocked his bushy head in an attitude of listening, then lifted his eyes to the east. Suddenly he hopped to his feet and pointed excitedly with his knife.

"Sky-boats, eh?" McKinney scrambled erect and scanned the skies.

THEN he saw the bomber formation swooping downward from the clouds, apparently over Lae. As he watched, a gray puff burst far below the planes, while drifting up the narrow valley of the Wussi on the offshore wind there came the faint crash of exploding bombs.

"Hell's bells!" he roared delightedly. "Somebody's raiding the Japs."

With calm deliberation, Tuck lifted the Cornishman and set it on top of the bubbling stew to steam. Rising, he waddled to his swag for his binoculars and focused the glasses upon this distant planes.

"Bloody well right!" he declared. "Hope they give them blighters a strafin' they won't forget for a Dutch month."

"Cripes!" Ridgeley exclaimed unbelievingly. "I didn't know our people were so far along with the war."

"There's a whole bloody lot you don't know," Tuck drawled, the glasses glued to his eyes. "We're slow to get started. But, once we do start, somethin' always tears. My bloody oath!"

For a while there was no more conversation. Fascinated, the three white men watched the circling bombers. Chappie danced excitedly from one foot to the other. The six Mopi bearers and their head man came together like frightened sheep and stared with superstitious awe toward the silvery dragon-flies flitting in and out through the puff-ball monsoon clouds over Lae, high above the gray bursts of Jap ack-ack.

Far below the bombers buzzed a swarm of Zero fighters, apparently unable to get within effective striking distance of the bigger planes. Occasionally one of the little Jap crates would streak earthward, trailing smoke. Calmly, as if they were on a practice flight, the big bombers circled high above the clouds, sowing destruction on the airfield, from which rose a dense column of smoke. At last the bombers swung seaward and disappeared.

Tuck sat down on his swag and grinned. "The bloody tide's turned at last, Yank, what?"

"Looks that way," McKinney admitted, adding with a grin, "You had something to do with turning the tide yourself, old-timer."

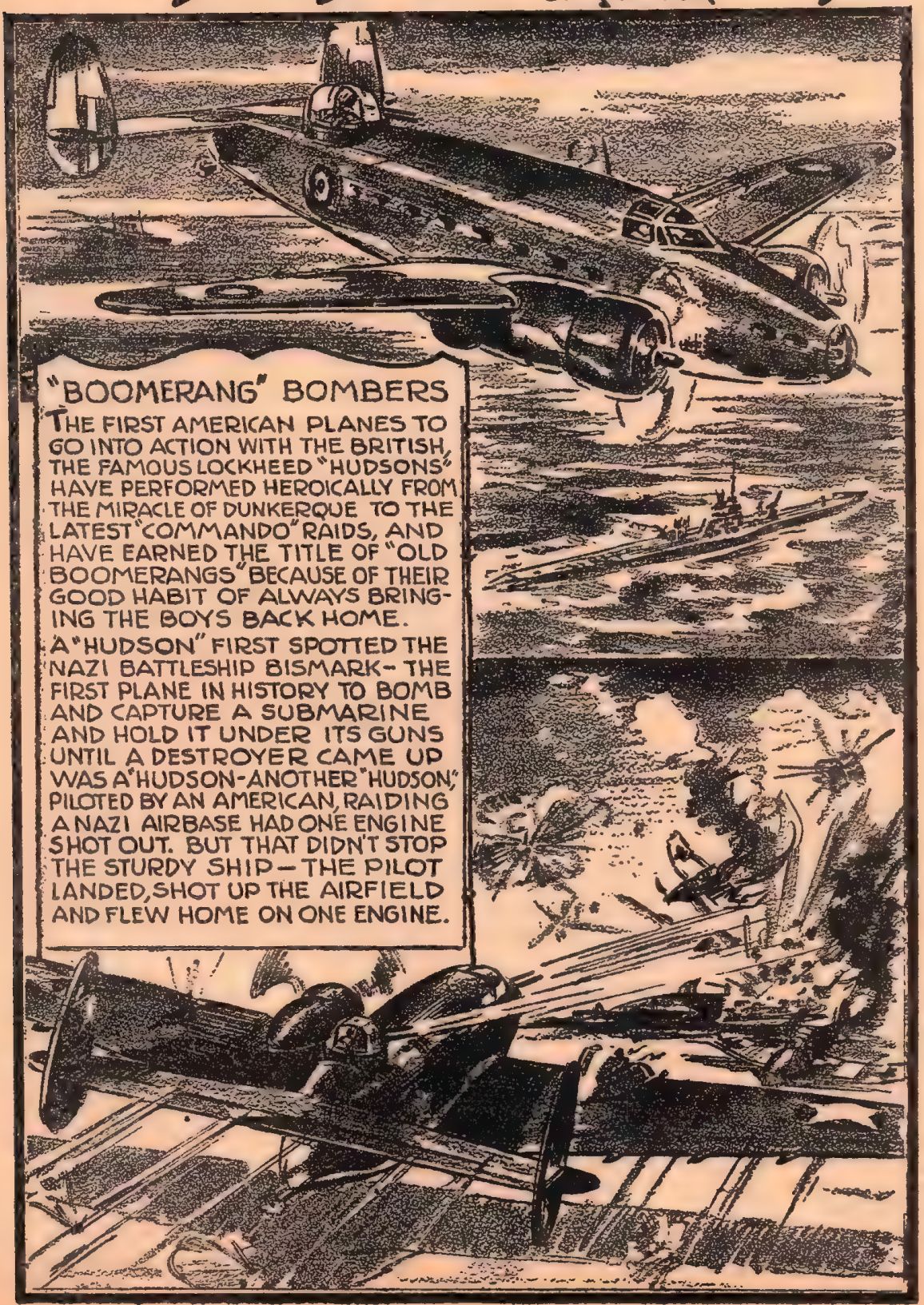
"I suppose you'll be going home to the States, to join up with your own mob," Ridgeley ventured. "We'll be sorry to lose you."

McKinney and Tuck looked at each other and both grinned. Aside from themselves, few people were aware that McKinney was already signed up with Naval Intelligence. Tuck saved McKinney a long explanation by saying:

"Him go back to the States? No bloody fear o' that." He pointed the stem of his pipe at McKinney and added with a sly grin. "Besides, he can't go home till the show's over, as he's part o' the Yank's Lease-Lend plan, y'know."

Wings for Victory

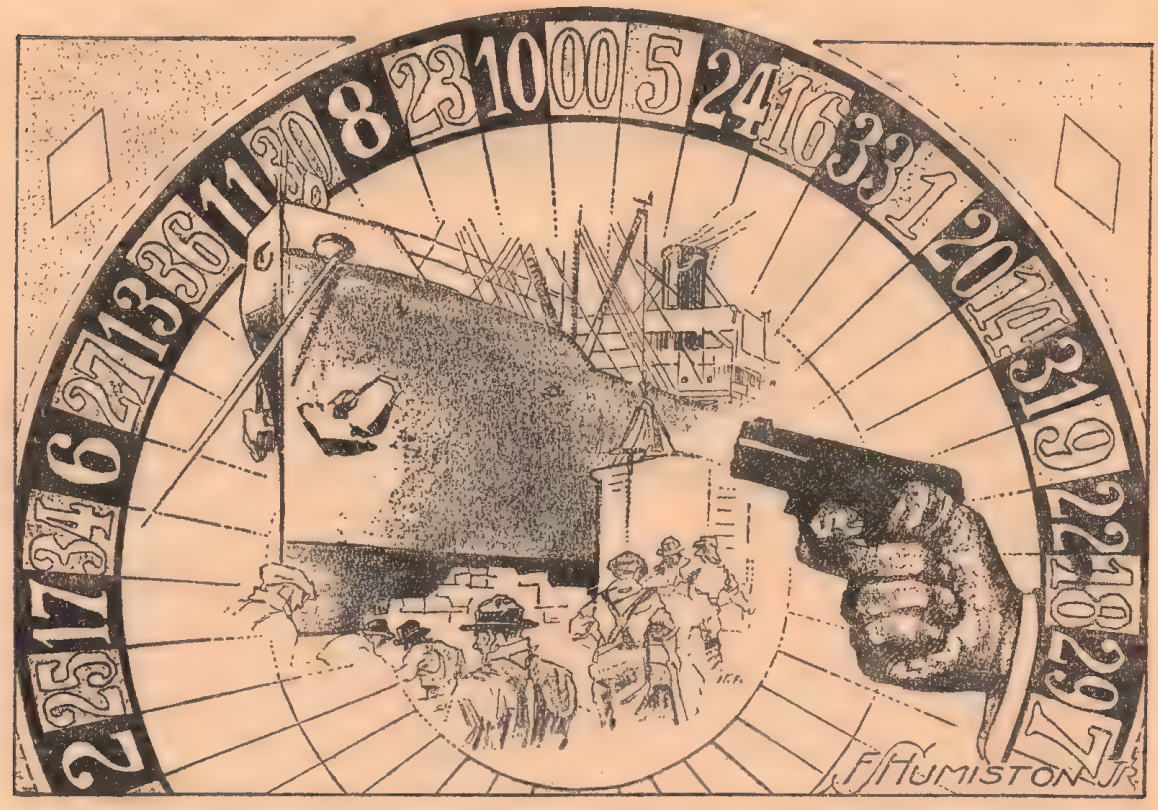
BY Jim Irby



"BOOMERANG" BOMBERS

THE FIRST AMERICAN PLANES TO GO INTO ACTION WITH THE BRITISH, THE FAMOUS LOCKHEED "HUDSONS" HAVE PERFORMED HEROICALLY FROM THE MIRACLE OF DUNKERQUE TO THE LATEST "COMMANDO" RAIDS, AND HAVE EARNED THE TITLE OF "OLD BOOMERANGS" BECAUSE OF THEIR GOOD HABIT OF ALWAYS BRINGING THE BOYS BACK HOME.

A "HUDSON" FIRST SPOTTED THE NAZI BATTLESHIP BISMARK - THE FIRST PLANE IN HISTORY TO BOMB AND CAPTURE A SUBMARINE AND HOLD IT UNDER ITS GUNS UNTIL A DESTROYER CAME UP WAS A "HUDSON-ANOTHER "HUDSON," PILOTED BY AN AMERICAN, RAIDING A NAZI AIRBASE HAD ONE ENGINE SHOT OUT. BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP THE STURDY SHIP — THE PILOT LANDED, SHOT UP THE AIRFIELD AND FLEW HOME ON ONE ENGINE.



SHELLY TAKES A HAND

By B. E. COOK

Author of Many Tales of the Sea

SHELLY could not question the judgment of the Chief of Inspectors, but he sensed that something was wrong. He did not know then that Headquarters had given it more than routine consideration when the brand new inspector, Norocki, got the call to board the S.S. *Oneco* and bring in sailor Robert Fairtile.

This Norocki had been on night patrol along those wharves until yesterday and of course he knew the *Oneco,* or should. Truth was, he had come to know some of her men, had accepted coffee in her galley. And what else? This had been the question in the chief's mind.

"Well, what do we start off with?" Shelly asked big Norocki.

"Going there now, aren't we? Oh, start with?" The inspector gave Shelly a suspicious glance. "You've been on plenty of these cases yourself. Me, I'd say it might have been this Fairtile; sailors go uptown and come back all hours, not always sober or good-natured. This might be one that's trying to go out of circulation because his draft number's coming up. Anyhow, I can identify Fairtile."

Who couldn't have? Turned twenty-one, lean, tall, big hands curled from gripping lines, "RF" tattooed on the left forearm. Norocki couldn't miss him. Shelly sized up the lad in the doorway of the master's cabin. He looked taut and drawn, as though he'd suddenly aged in realizing the price of getting caught. As assistant

to inspectors for four years, Shelly had seen these things and more. Shelly tried to keep this fact in mind, but he watched the lad.

Why in hell had the chief put the likes of Norocki on such a case?

Shelly watched Fairtile step in and the eyes avoided Captain Lacey, aiming between Inspector Norocki and himself. This prisoner, he thought, is not going to blurt. Have to work it out of him, maybe; he wondered how Norocki would measure up to that technique.

Captain Lacey of the *Oneco* was simplifying matters, though, by repeating the sailor's story. And the inspector looked sharp when he saw it coming. Shelly saw this, it made him uneasy; Norocki was new to this, he hadn't asked for the information.

The skipper said, "This sailor claims the steward was dead when he saw the light on and went in about 1:10. I asked him why he'd walked in at that hour and his reason was sandwiches, no grub in the messroom. He admits that he and others have been raking steward about this. He complains that the steward should have put less attention on gambling over cards and all, at all hours, in his room—and put more attention to 'feeding us guys as he's paid for.' I asked him why he quit the ship that night and came back again."

Shelly glanced up; a pertinent question, this.

"He replied they'd advised him in union headquarters if he didn't want a lot of publicity for his folks to be ashamed of he'd come back here and give himself up. Especially where he was so sure he was not guilty of anything but discovering a murder—or suicide."

"Suicide!" Norocki breathed, and Shelly thought Norocki wouldn't snort out thus when he'd had a few more cases. "But," Shelly reminded himself, "I don't fall for that suicide hint. Nor the captain's repeat on the sailor's story." But he caught himself measuring the lad.

THE Chief of Police mopped his chin. The humidity was high, his Chief of Inspectors long-winded. "All right, Nally, all right. It's not the usual procedure, specially with an inspector sergeant on his first case. If you're so sure we ought to let Norocki handle it, go ahead. You can always come into the case if it's slipping out of his fingers."

While down in the cool semi-darkness of the main hall a man entered with twofold purpose: to interview the prisoner, and to avoid publicity. For Captain Fairtile of the liner *Antilles* knew too much about his son's past. He could not forget the night he'd haled Bob to his own cabin, paid him off and said, "Here's a discharge that will get you a sailor's job. You're not to circulate, however, as Cap'n M. V. Fairtile's son. You're on your own." And today, above all else, he recalled his parting advice:

"Young man, no more stealing. For gawdsake, Bob, don't go on crooked! Do you realize you might have killed that bosun when you slugged him for catching you?"

Captain Fairtile flapped his gray coat for more air. He thought, ". . . might have killed that bosun. . . ." while his eyes became accustomed to the semi-dark. He made out the lean cheeks and high brow of Shelly at the foot of the stairs.

"Hot morning," Shelly said. "What did you want, Mister?"

"I want a word with"—the captain caught himself—"with that sailor Fairtile."

"Your name, sir?" Shelly saw the resemblance. He sensed the attitude; he had seen these things for years, he missed nothing.

The captain refused his name, his reason. "Let me talk to him."

"Sorry, sir. Not now. The rule—"

"What rule? Who rules that a man can't see his own boy? I'll damsoon—"

"Easy, Mister, easy," Shelly warned quietly. "You're his father then. I'll

take you to Inspector Norocki's office to wait."

Captain Fairtile waited, but remained hot. He exhibited to Norocki that quirk in many ship masters; he expected to be heeded ashore as he was aboard ship. He revealed that he was captain of a liner. He considered Norocki too stupid to rate even a bosun. Certainly he judged the inspector capable of cruelty and devoid of reasoning. At length he got down to this: "At least I can speak to him."

"In time, in due time."

"By God, I'll get me a lawyer and see! What in hell is this?"

"Murder," said Norocki, but his eyes looked larger at mention of a lawyer.

So Shelly noted outside where neither saw him. He compared the skirmish with a dozen others. Four years of assisting inspectors and stopping interruptions for them by these hot-heads should have case-hardened Shelly. But today he assured himself his curiosity reached only for the evidence revealed in words and exhibited emotions. He concluded that Norocki was dumb not to handle the father right; he himself might use Captain Fairtile of the *Antilles*. So fiercely intense a partisan, you couldn't guess what he might do—or already had done.

Shelly weighed this. He pictured that thickhead behind the desk coming up against a sailing master in his gold braid, character witness for a talented defense. "Norocki against that!" he murmured. Then he reminded himself, "I should worry. But he recalled the sailor's steady eye, his stubborn silence. Some lad!

Shelly saw the captain prove to be, not silent, but as stubborn. Saw him confront the Chief of Police—and the latter kept his promise to the Chief of Inspectors. "So you're all working hand-in-glove to break that boy," the captain thundered. "Your flathead inspector must win his case. He's got to pin murder on somebody. That boy was in and out of the steward's room, flathead has nobody else on the scene that he can grab, so he'll keep off me and everybody till he can make the boy confess to murder, whether or no!" Shelly decided that Captain Fairtile, at least was in good form.

And well might he be; it was his only child—and the boy he had once discharged for thieving in the cargo. He left in a rage, his brain full of getting lawyers and bail, doing some investigating himself. But always he must take care to keep from himself the finger of shame, the publicity, the losing of a trip, possibly more trips, mayhap command of his ship.

This checked him on a corner in the blazing sun. From an open window he heard, ". . . the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?" He read, "Salvation Army" over the door. Shelly saw him go on and murmured, "He'll get no lawyer —yet."

INSPECTOR NOROCKI felt his oats—or was it nervousness from inexperience? He ordered Shelly out. Shelly had a final look at the prisoner in the chair. The overhead light's heat was affecting him more than its glare. How stubborn a young guy could be, unhampered by years of accumulated punishments by experience, short memory to flay him and force his tongue. Well, Shelly mused, when Norocki gives him this treatment—he closed the door.

Norocki kept his coat buttoned for effect despite the heat. He swayed menacingly, locked thick fingers behind him. A squirt of perspiration dropped to his outthrust lower lip; he licked at it, intent upon the dead pan young face under the glare.

"Stubborn, huh? Nothing to say. Hard guy sailor. Pretty young to fake that line. Too young to get away with it. That cockeyed yarn o' yours'll give the jury a big laugh."

The sailor's eyes registered perceptibly when the big, hulking mass of Norocki came close. Somehow part of Norocki clipped a knee cap. Fairtile's right hand

rubbed it slowly, cautiously, with splayed fingers accustomed to gripping hawsers.

Now the inspector's breath struck hot and foul on his face. "Come, speak up if you want to live."

"I have told my story. It is the truth. There is nothing more I can say about it." He spoke in the measured tempo of careful premeditation.

"Ho, ho," Norocki guffawed. His little eyes set like twins behind ridges of flesh. "You 'have told—' Wait till they're done with you and your 'story.' Lots of them like you—till it's too late. Kid stuff." He ran a big paw to Fairtile's face and up. It looked natural enough but the lad's left eye smarted and his skull thrummed when the hand left it.

So the Chief of Inspectors observed as he entered the already unlatched door. "Well, Inspector," he remarked, perhaps for the prisoner's edification, "he has come through with the facts, has he? . . . No?"

Norocki took the cue. "Not yet; he will. He's one o' them that wakes up too late and cries. Cries? He'll yell. I said *yell*. 'No, not the chair. Not that,' he's going to yell." Norocki wiped a thick hand up his own brow, faced the chief and said gruffly in carefully set tone, "I'll go mad, Chief. I tell you—"

Until he knew, the sailor's thoughts should be off himself and on this play between inspector and chief. Then he wheeled again to shock with surprise. "You said the steward gambled. Where's the boodle?"

Fairtile's lips parted—closed. The trick had not thrown him, not quite. Sailors grow accustomed to loud demands in docking ship.

Norocki couldn't forget his chief's presence. His first case. Must get results. There were other reasons. He gave Fairtile the hypnotic stare and said, "All right. These killers look smart beforehand like you do now. But wait. You're in a cell one month. Then it's two weeks to wait. Only ten days to go. One week to the end. Four days and half a night, they say. One day; you hear them out there, electricians. You ask the guard, 'Is nobody working to get me outa here?' The guard walks off, he's seen killers break before—"

Fairtile's face drained white. Came the pace of feet outside.

"That's how it sounds!" Norocki leaned close again. The sweat dripped on Fairtile's shirt. "And you think you're tough," he snarled in stage whisper. "Ahr-r, you're too young. You can't go through that. You'll yell—too late."

Now the door closed. The pacing outside ceased. Norocki struck a button viciously, Shelly entered. Norocki mopped and said to him, "Look. Isn't that the perfect baby-face killer? Stupid like 'em, too. Doesn't even think to call it an accident. Or self-defense. Or mistaken identity. Or even suicide. Nothing that might give us an opening to save him from the—to charge him with just manslaughter."

"No?" It was Shelly's cue.

"No. Found the steward dead on the floor, not a planned murder. No premeditation. Steward got mad and flew at him in one o' those Portuguese rages. And this one loses his head. He's rattled. He sees red. He let's go. Ahr-r!"

Shelly saw him contact the knee. He noted the bungling; Norocki had worked up to the matter of the gun, then failed to demand where the kid got it, where he left it. Shelly reminded himself yet again, this was Norocki's case, his first. The chief had got the big chief to leave it to Norocki. Why so? Why the devil would Nally do a thing like that? But Shelly had talked

with Nally outside the door a while ago. Now he watched Norocki mopping his bull neck.

Norocki said, "I've got to eat. Big, rare steak, onions, apple pie crowned white." He looked for the effect of this on the prisoner. Not a sign of hunger, only a hint of the prolonged strain colored the whiteness and the hand rubbed the clipped knee cap softly.

SHELLY'S turn. He knew the line expected of him, a contrast to Norocki's line. He hauled a chair just outside the glare. "Well," he said comfortably, "have to stay here. We might as well talk. Anything I can get you—that is allowed?"

Fairtile measured this one, searched his longer face, made up his mind. "I have rights as an American. I have the right to ask for help. That's any man's law. I want—"

Shelly cut in: "Your father?"

"No, sir! Can't bring him into this."

"We can. He can testify to your past, your character."

Fairtile sat upright, his first real response. This, then, was the opening wedge —and Norocki had worked an hour? No shame on dad, huh? Good break, this.

"He could give you a good character," Shelly pursued gently.

"No," the lad objected, "leave him out."

Shelly's brows lifted. "So-o? Hm. I begin to see." Now he knew he was going to look up the captain of the *Antilles*. But he said, "Then how about mother?"

That hurt. The prisoner flinched, caught himself and slumped back into the old position, head back, hands in lap. But the knuckles crackled.

"Queer about mother," Shelly persisted mercilessly. "We make her scold, we steal her doughnuts, we sass her back—then we desert her. She pulled us through the measles. She shielded us from dad and—"

Shelly poured it on and on. The words came from habit; this had often been his role, playing second to inspectors like Norocki, softening up suspects after terrific blastings. Somehow, today, he hated it. Maybe he knew it wouldn't work, possibly he hoped it wouldn't, perhaps the white face in that glare.

He could think while his tongue ran on. Did he really want to succeed? He could not forget that the evidence against this lad was tenuous at best. The kid stuck to a story and, though quaint indeed, it presented not one loop-hole through which lies had been detected.

Add to this Shelly's own private thoughts since the murder had come to light. He always indulged them; he liked the possibilities therein. Some day he might fool the guy over him. He might. And in this case, what? Well, Norocki's one-track brain must have overlooked it, but there was plenty you simply could not get clear.

Not, certainly, by drilling this stubborn sailor. For instance: the Steward Alves the notorious gambler and card sharp; Alves always winning; cards, dice, even a wheel. Aye, Shelly had gone aboard there alone early today and given that room more than the onceover Norocki had bestowed upon it. But Norocki had apparently worked on one line only, from the outset, viz: pin it onto this Fairtile. Shelly's disgust for Norocki was rising with his feeling for the —he eyed the white face, the boyish eyes in their blackness. Just an emotional kid.

And that fateful night had been Norocki's on beat. Oh, he'd been gunning a long time for inspector's rating. Keeping him on a waterfront night beat till the very day of the shiftover might have been the last whack the big chief could take at a man he didn't want for an inspector. It could have been a final schooling for the thickhead to familarize him with the places in town where his future work ought to take him. Shelly couldn't be sure which, but Norocki the inspector of today had been, that night, patrolman Norocki on beat. On that beat, the night Alves got shot.

Norocki was not alert; possibly not even

suspicious enough. A stolid cop with friends who were friends of the commissioners. A cop once tried out as a police captain and put back down at his own request. And he had not brought in the news of the Alves' murder; this boy had discovered the body, run out, run back, surrendered himself to tell one fixed story.

Shelly lighted a cigarette.

THAT evening the prisoner had to be watered and fed in his cell. Shelly sat alone with Norocki; he'd had a busy day. He heard Norocki sneer, "I set him up for you. You have him all to y'rself 'most two hours. I come back and what? You're smoking a cigarette!"

Shelly lighted one. "I know," he murmured.

"You know! Shelly, this is why you're second fiddle. Why you were playing second fiddle on these cases when I joined the force."

Shelly blew a ring. "Don't live right, huh? Don't have the right friends?"

Norocki flushed. "You nasty mud-slinger! With these two hands I could mash your lazy brain. Whadda you mean, talking to y'r superior that way on a case? And where the merry hell've you been all day, outside a coupla hours with me and my prisoner?"

Off-handedly, "Boy's father came; I sent him up. Remember? Well, he rang up later. You were giving Fairtile the works. I took the call."

"What did he want that time?"

"Me to go over the scene for more clues."

"And you didn't. Go on."

"But I did."

"You wha-at?" Norocki's face drew taut, his fist pounded. "After I'd done all that? Went over my head, eh?"

"Merely did it for you—that time. You see, you're busy today; I'm supposed to lighten your load. Or am I?"

"Yeah, yeah." Norocki's line of reasoning had been severed. On second impulse, however, "Oh. You collected no more evidence." He watched Shelly closely.

"Yes, a roulette wheel distributed in pieces. Neat hiding, that."

"A spinner! We-ell, this *is* something." But his enthusiasm failed to register, so, "You're not so dead in the dome, at that. Now this wheel; might've been a gambling joint down there."

"On your beat."

Again Norocki blew up. "Listen, you. Are you on this case with me or—or to trip me up? Sure 'twas on my beat and I admit that bothers me. All right, this is my first case, I'm on a tight spot, and here you wisecrack me instead of helping. I've got to pin it on that sailor, see? That's the only solution. He's the only one around there at 1:10 a.m."

"What does Chief Nally say?" Shelly bypassed.

"Him? Aw, he snoops and says nothing. Not till I bust the case wide open; then, when the sailor breaks down and admits everything, you watch Nally grab the credit. You've been around here longer than me, you ought to know that."

"He was listening outside when I came to take over questioning the prisoner. I slipped away quietly awhile."

Norocki's face opened wide. "You what? Y' catch 'im red-handed like that and let 'im get away with it? You fool!"

"Been a long day," Shelly sighed, "and no soap."

"Time, Shelly, time. It works on the prisoner for us. Now where else have you roamed today on your own?"

"Me? Well, the chief met me down the hall outside his office."

Another jolt. Was this a case or a nightmare, Norocki asked. His case, as agreed, or were all hands taking it on? "What's his line?"

Shelly weighed that one carefully. "We merely talked about waterfront beats; yours in particular. Naturally."

"Checking up on me?" Norocki's eyes looked larger to Shelly.

"Might be. You know where you were, about 1:10, so what if he does?"

Norocki tried in his heavy way to read Shelly's thoughts; the face was too calm. Then he caught on; this Shelly was an under pup indulging his one-hoss sense of humor by prodding his betters. By hoping to make Norocki account for himself? Well, there were limits! Norocki held his tongue.

And it succeeded. The silence drove Shelly out. But not as yet from the building. He descended into the cool of the basement and engaged old "Turnkeys" in further chatter. He remained inside because for all the badgering, Norocki had come across with no information of his own.

He had merely defended himself. For instance—he could have at least mentioned the gun under some litter on his desk. Hadn't he known it was there? Was it the "lethal weapon" in the case? Why was any gun there tonight? Presumably the killer's gun had been, by now, checked with the bullet and fingerprints taken—if recovered.

Matters of this nature prevented Shelly's leaving; this and the fact that Norocki plainly had wanted him out of the way. Would he examine that weapon alone? Didn't he trust his assistant and the latter's past experience? Or was he aiming for another go at Fairtile tonight when the chief and—presumably—Shelly wouldn't be handy to eavesdrop on him?

ALL of Shelly's theories got thumbs down when, from a dark end of the basement passageway he beheld Captain Fairtile descending the stairs. And Norocki was at his heels. So-o-o, he deducted, the inspector's working this from his own private angle!

They went directly to the cell bars. Now Norocki motioned to Turnkeys and the latter let the father inside. Well! But Norocki had much to learn; he was unpredictable tonight. Did he hope to overhear damning revelations in their conversation?

If so, it must have failed, for he soon motioned for Turnkeys. Captain Fairtile came out, keys rattled at the cage door. The father climbed the stairs and Norocki waved the jailer off down the far end of the passageway. He let himself into the cell, sat on the cot and talked. "The old father-son stuff?" Shelly murmured. "No go. I tried that."

But no. Norocki grabbed the kid's collar, hoisted him, gave him the works. Would that Norocki ever learn? Was he starting already his return to the pavements as he had once before? At this rate, yes. Shelly almost pitied him. He pitied the lad more.

Then Norocki was gone. Turnkeys accepted the key, Norocki climbed. Probably to stand off Captain Fairtile waiting upstairs. Or do something about that gun under the litter. "He'd better or I'll go up and tell him so."

Shelly sauntered toward the staircase. He waved a lazy nighty-night to old Turnkeys, observed how still and taut the sailor sat, and cursed Norocki for entering that cell tonight.

He mounted the stairs.

From the top step he heard voices below. He stopped, listened, heard only one but it was too low to reveal words. Menacing, though. Turnkeys would not speak that way. Now metal clinked; Turnkeys' keys? Unlocking that cell again? Shelly went back down. He did not seem to hurry, but when he beheld the dully shining steel in the Fairtile boy's fist— No, he did not shout, just walked as you'd go to a faucet. No speed, no fury. He was an enigma anyway; either he took too much for granted or he lacked a sense of peril. He

approached the cage at an angle so that Fairtile's gun must cover two ways.

"Here, here, Bob," he said paternally, "drop the gat before it sends you up for sure."

"Stand clear!" the lad threatened, but his hand shook in trying to aim both ways at once.

It looked like an impasse. Shelly noted old Turnkeys's holster protruding beneath lifted coat tail. No good. Could not clear it in time. So what then? Meantime he watched the prisoner for the effect of this interruption, and now the effect of prolonging it. Shelly thought fast, and well he might.

At long length he spoke. "Bob Fairtile, we'll never get to clear you this way. Suppose you drive us now? You can. Then you get out. You're not free; hundreds of dicks and secret service experts will hunt you as a killer who practically convicted himself by breaking jail with a gun. Maybe a day, might be months, but not years because it'll prey on you till you turn yourself in or go mad or kill yourself. Think, Bob, before it's too late. Think hard, kid."

The black eyes had lost some of their gleaming triumph, not all of it. The stall for time had not succeeded nor had the talk. Shelly had lost both rounds and now Turnkey's arms wavered overhead, tiring. Just then the day's fearful heat gave way to a startling thunderclap outside. The sailor jumped—the gun did not go off. Phew! His unfamiliarity with weapons right then was patent. This and the grace of God had saved the lad from shooting.

Now rain blasted the windows. Lightning flashed. The effect of so many interruptions showed Shelly that the lad's desperate purpose was demobilizing. This business had gone far enough. Shelly asked him quietly, "Why did you call the jailer, kid?"

"Huh, you wouldn't know. Open up, Grandpa. Lemme outa this 'fore I blast y'r lock. I never killed anybody in my life. This is a dirty frame because I'm a sailor, easy pickings, and the cops gotta tag somebody to save their jobs. Open—that—dam'—"

Secretly Shelly had to agree with some of that speech. Hadn't the father said practically the same things this morning? Well, Shelly too had come to suspect certain things himself after scrutinizing the steward's room alone. And making Norocki talk. And hearing the chief's story. And seeing that gun on Norocki's desk.

This, in fact, looked like the same gun. No. Shelly checked himself, the new inspector was stupid but not that stupid. But right now Norocki's handling of the case looked dumb indeed. There is more than grilling and timing and routine investigation of the premises to solving a killing. Threatening, scaring and cuffing the first suspect to break him under ordeal and make him confess killing whether or no—Shelly's usually calm face registered disgust. Solution above justice! Perhaps this accounted for his overlong service as a mere assistant. He had often wondered.

"Turnkeys, open the cage."

The sailor's gun lowered to point cautiously at the lock. He noted Shelly's disgust but misunderstood it. The barred door swung. Before Fairtile could step to the opening, Shelly walked in. While the lad was massing final courage, while the adrenalin to meet the redoubled crisis started through his bloodstream, Shelly had moved in. But with his hands high overhead.

The lad aimed. He could not bring himself to shoot such a target, to kill. Could you? Few have done it and they were either born killers or nervous wrecks. Shelly's nerve shocked old Turnkeys. He gaped, then his hand edged toward that holster.

"No," Shelly said evenly. "Leave us alone. I want to get this whole thing to rights."

Turnkeys left. The lad's gun slowly eased to his right side, ready. He watched the performance cynically, suspecting another police trick in this and baffled more

than Norocki's pressure tactics had rendered him. "What's this, another third degree trick?"

"Far from it. Robert Fairtile, I myself want to know what happened aboard the *Oneco*. First let me spill what I do know. Alves was a crooked gambler. Roulette wheel. Kept it hid in scattered pieces—"

"He did not," surlily. "All in one piece covered up between his locker and the ship's side."

"Did he? How'd you know, play it?"

"Nah. We were onto that guy; everybody aft was anyway."

Important wrinkle, this. And Shelly himself, not Norocki, had discovered it. "Maybe Alves had a crowd in gambling that night."

"Wrong again; no crowds; too foxy. 'Twould make noise and trouble. Drinking and all. One at a time there, never more'n two. Smart guy, Alves."

"Maybe too smart—once."

"Could be," the sailor admitted. "Somebody sure shot 'im for something."

"Think of the cash changed hands in there," Shelly remarked.

"Hm. One guy lost a month's pay in ten minutes, so they said. They wanted like hell to beat that guy's rack— Hey, what's the idea? This gab don't clear me. I tell you I was not there when he was shot!"

"That's what I want to know, Bob. Where were you?"

"Okay. You won't believe it any more'n the big guy."

"Go on, spill."

Fairtile had gone ashore after supper because the *Antilles,* his father's ship, was in. "Aimed to make a deal. If he'd forgive what I'd done to him, I'd apologize and we could call quits."

"Done what?"

Fairtile realized too late. By degrees he admitted that as sailor on the *Antilles* he and others had stolen shoes from the cargo on the way to Rio. "Now what the hell's that to do with this mess?" and his right hand at the far side closed on the gun on the cot beside his leg. Shelly was losing his spell over the lad.

"Nothing except it explains why your father shies away from publicity in this. Met him upstairs this a.m. Later, on the phone. But you had him down here tonight—and that night ashore you went to the *Antilles*. Right?"

"Wrong. Nah, I'm just another sailor to him. I chucked it and took in a show; but I gabbed with a bunch off the *Antilles* and got back aboard late. You know the rest."

"Go on from there."

Fairtile told identically the same sequence that Captain Lacey of the *Oneco* had retailed. He concluded with: "Then that boob in union rooms says go back so the cops wouldn't chase me for the murder. That's exactly what I do. And they do, you dicks. Now, Mister, you gotta get me a lawyer, my ol' man, anybody! I tell you this ain't right!"

"Steady, Bob; probably somebody in the ship's crew—" Shelly ventured.

"Hey, you, get that crew idea outa your thick heads. He never hooked us guys for much, we'd 'ave razzed his pants ashore."

"Somebody ashore did it, huh? The whole world is ashore, kid." Shelly rose, his nonchalance somewhat spent. He looked down on the black hair, head in hands, gun on the farther side next the pillow. "Fairtile"—the hungry eyes searched his long face—"going to pass over that dam' gun? I've got to get busy right away, tonight, now, to prove you didn't kill Alves. While you pack a gun here I can't do much."

The lad stared as though he'd been deceived again and abruptly realized it. He froze to the black steel and said, "Oh, yeah? So that's the line; feed me sob stuff to get this gun from me. That's just too bad."

"Listen, kid, I can't tell you all I've collected in this case, but it—"

"You just get me somebody."

"Not me. All I do is prove somehow that you didn't do it." In a lower tone, "If only I had the gun used, the right weapon! Come, Bobbie, better give me that one; men like you sometimes go haywire and shoot themselves. Come, hand it over, time counts, I've got lots to do—for you."

Not until Shelly had gone did it occur to the prisoner that Shelly had not asked how he had come by the weapon. "Wouldn't believe me if I told him I found it halfway under my pillow. Now there's something! How——"

CAPTAIN M. V. FAIRTILE'S assurance tonight baffled Shelly. He talked freely while Shelly's eyes admired the cabin. When the monologue ran out, Shelly asked bluntly, "What's your real reason for big lawyers, bail and no publicity?"

"Be sane. I'm that boy's father."

"Who set him going once for petty larceny."

The captain lost much of his poise. "So he's even spilled that. Against himself! You men are certainly forcing a confession whether he did it or not."

"Then he might have done it? Is that why we found a gun in his hands after you left him tonight?"

"What? My God!"

"Okay, Captain, forget it. Now you said Captain Lacey let you into Alves' room on the other ship. Secretly, without our sayso. Well, two and two make four; you see how bad it looks; after you've been there, a gun's put in the boy's hands."

Captain Fairtile tried to hide his confusion. Shelly waited for the next reaction. It came thus: "See here, Mr. Shelly, Bob is all I've got. He's like me, I know him better than you do. He might look and sound like a tough character—" It was an appeal, it added nothing.

Shelly rose, reached for his hat. "That's your story, then." He headed for the door in a static silence. He didn't hurry because thus far his visit had failed in its chief purpose. Now he was setting this man up for a final shot. He opened the door, set one foot outside. Abruptly he aboutfaced: "You found a gun in Alves' room. You have not mentioned that, Captain Fairtile."

The skipper stood up, gave him eye for eye. "Are you by any chance prejudiced?"

"That is a queer question, I'm a policeman."

"Prejudiced, I said. In the boy's favor?"

This man certainly had parts! Shelly took quick stock of himself, of the tight situation, of this man. "I am. I admit it —to his father. I do not believe he ever held a gun in his hands till tonight. But it is another thing to clear him. I lack vital evidence; that's why I came down here at this late hour."

Captain Fairtile turned aside, whirled the disc on his safe, opened it and came up with a wadded, dusty towel. He unrolled it gingerly and a revolver was there. Said he, "Just as quick as I heard, I got to the *Oneco* and Cap'n Lacey let me into that room."

"So it *was* in there," Shelly mused. "After Norocki inspected it—before I went in alone later. Well!"

"Not at all. It lay in the dirt against the front of the shed on the wharf. Just a dirty rag in the dirt."

"May I take this along? Well, well! This puts the finger on—good night, Captain. Wish us luck."

ASHORE again, Shelly phoned Norocki's home. Not there. He went to Headquarters, to Norocki's office. Not there. Locked. Shelly used a masterkey He returned the gun taken from the sailor to the litter. In doing so, he spotted a quart brandy flask two-thirds empty. That flask received his undivided attention. Then he planned and laid out a situation from that as a starter, concealing the dusty towel within easy reach. He left the office

muttering, "Hell, it's sold stuff. It's not even ingenious. But neither is he."

Turnkeys cautioned him at the basement stairhead. He heard Norocki grilling the sailor again. This time Norocki was demanding the whereabouts of the gun! Shelly foresaw the end of Norocki's career as an inspector; he was drunk. Shelly conveyed to Turnkeys by sign language: "I'm waiting for him upstairs when he's through down there."

But Norocki sent the jailer up. "Come down but watch y'self, he's half full and nasty and you're next." Since Shelly had not gone above the main floor, he and the jailer arrived below sooner than expected —to see Norocki fling the limp sailor to the cot, turn on them in his rage and snarl at Shelly, "So *you* got his gat away from him. Who brought it here?"

"Which gat?" Shelly countered softly. Immediately he saw the small eyes dart in surprise. Valleys lengthened the face, paralleling the nose.

"Where the hell is it?"

Shelly invoked one of his silences.

"Shelly, I'm fed up with you. From the start of this case, you—"

Until the time came when Shelly could say, "Let's go upstairs to talk." He led the way.

Norocki unlocked his office with difficulty. Shelly, as planned, preceded him in, pointed to the gun under the litter and said, "Look at it. You go off half cocked." But he made sure that he stood between it and Norocki. He brought up the bottle and said, "Well, well! Here, steady yourself."

Somewhat befuddled by what he had whangled from the prisoner, from liquor, from Shelly's appearance at this hour, and from the sight of that gun under the litter, Norocki eyed Shelly. Always he suspected jolts when this guy deigned to do or suggest anything, however trivial. But he needed the drink. He gulped it down.

Shelly eyed the empty flask. "Gee, where's mine?"

"Don't cry, baby," Norocki taunted him, opening a drawer while Shelly blocked the way to that gun in the litter. Norocki reached in, came out with a quart of brandy, looked Shelly's way and blinked. "That gun. It's gone again!" He blinked, slatted his head, too drunk to reason out even that one.

"Again, huh?" Shelly felt it against his hip.

The "again" registered. Norocki bit his lip. "Here, you, swill. Then you talk or by God I'll—"

"Yeah, what?" Carefully Shelly was breaking his every attempt to complete an idea, stalling him along, playing for time. And for serious reason; this was to be the most serious hour in Shelly's career. His future and a boy's life, perhaps, hung upon his success in this office tonight.

Norocki took another drink and said, "Now where is that gun? Hand it over, you."

"Wait a minute, you've had two shots of the brandy and I've had only one." He reached for the flask, took a niggardly swallow. He didn't fancy raw liquor and this stuff was exceptionally potent and raw. Now he belched and complained, "Awful stuff, Inspector, awful. Br-r-r!"

NOROCKI'S scorn was withering. "Gimme that, you lemonade squirt," and he downed half of it. "Now, mister, where—"

But "mister" was pressing both fists to his stomach. "You big fool," he whimpered, "that rotgul'll surely ruin your insides."

It flattered Norocki, he grabbed up the flask. "Look, baby," and he drained it.

And collapsed before he could get to a chair.

In response to Shelly's phone call, Nally arrived at 2:25, eyed Norocki sprawled on the floor, raised doubting brows and: "Drunk, you said?"

"I doctored the first bottle. You know the stunt, he'll revive, Chief."

"Hm. What's this for? And me here at this ungodly hour?"

"We talked while Norocki worked on the sailor. Remember? Norocki rang in box 147 on the Custom House corner, you said? At midnight, sir."

"And he should have rung in again at 1 a. m. But he rang at 1:14, fourteen minutes late, and I told you I could crawl to that box from the end of Long Wharf in less time—and he says that's where he comes from to ring in 147 and he heard no disturbance 'fore leaving the ship's side. These things are what roused my suspicions when the murder first came in because I happened to know this Norocki both gambles and drinks some. My men did find gambling evidence and you found more. But, Shelly"—he waggled a finger—"no weapon."

"I know, Chief." Shelly must hear his superior out.

"Oh, you do. Good. And the bullet passed through the head and was found so flattened it's no good, I say, except its weight indicated the gauge of the weapon used. A little .22; which means fired at close range. Now Shelly," he warned, a disparaging eye on Norocki, "unless you've got a lot more 'n that on this one"—indicating Norocki—"he's still the inspector sergeant on the Alves case and I go back to bed."

Shelly sighed, "Yes, Chief. I suppose the best thing to place Norocki in that room definitely just before 1:10—"

Nally laughed at him. "—is the gun used. Simple, isn't it?"

"He could have wrapped one up to muffle it; that would leave no fingerprints."

Chief Nally countered: "The evidence indicated a quick killing. Only gunmen prepare beforehand against fingerprints. Any wrapping in this job, if any, was to muffle the noise. So I figure it and that'd mean he grabbed up the gun to wrap it quick, which leaves fingerprints. Some in a hurry do make that mistake, wrap it too late. You should know all this, man!"

"Should, Chief," and Shelly produced the gun in the dusty towel. He told where he'd got it. They reviewed the entire case, all the while perfecting the trap. For both wanted most earnestly to settle this now, tonight—this morning. The Chief said as much. Shelly added, "Without holding that poor kid for all the fingerprinting and delays." He met Nally's glance and released his pent-up emotions with, "Well, you've got boys at home, haven't you? That Fairtile is a good lad!"

IT WAS indeed a corny dodge; it was also a time-proven trap. And Norocki, stolid, befuddled, cornered, wit shy, and slow to start from blank mind to considered response—Norocki tonight was the perfect specimen for this test. All too well Shelly knew it; he'd known it when he had doctored the brandy. Because he had learned in four years to think ahead for inspectors, and this time for the kid downstairs.

Norocki did not come to, he was badgered out of his stupor. At his first mutterings of protest, before he was out of it enough to choose words or think double, Shelly got to the truth with a success that fairly took his breath—

". . . used his gun . . . toy . . . took it away from . . . crook . . . my dough to a rigged wheel!" Norocki babbled on, the Chief and his dictaphone concealed beyond the desk.

The instant Shelly saw full return to consciousness in Norocki's eyes, he hit him with, "You planted the gun on the kid so he'd practically convict himself!"

Norocki gaped, sat up, floundered to his feet to knock Shelly his length. He discovered Chief of Inspectors Nally and the dictaphone.

"Yes or no!" Nally demanded severely.

Norocki glared at the dictaphone and wilted. "Okay," he snarled.

"Locked into Your Own Jail, eh, While the Land Office is Gutted and the Agent Beat Half to Death!"

THE DEVIL VOTES WITH LEAD

By FRANK BONHAM

CHAPTER I

DIE-HARD GLORY-HOLER

HELLFIRE MARTIN, Sheriff Gus Hardy often said, always got the news first, and usually got it wrong. This warm September morning the veteran peacemaker of Dusty sat on the wide mud sill of his office window and read with a truculent eye the mixture of sarcasm, innuendo and libel that Hellfire had to offer in the *Dusty Bugle*.

Martin could not write up the weather without accusing someone of causing last week's hailstorm. He wrote with a pen dipped in acid, and the number of times he had libeled Gus corresponded roughly to the issue number below the masthead.

But always, around election time, Sheriff Gus was on the alert for any too-savage attack that might cost him votes. He had forced a retraction of an accusation of malfeasance last year by the grace of God and a pair of six-guns.

Gus lowered the paper as boots approached with an important-sounding jangle of spurs. It was not a joy to see Deacon Sam Caine, his foreman, and his lawyer enter, but the sheriff waved them to seats.

This gesture Caine ignored. He was a tall man, lean as a whip, with muscles that grew close to the bone. His clothes were tan whipcord, his hat a high-roll Stetson, his spurs forged for show; he wore his pants' legs tucked into the tops of his sharkskin boots, and in New Mexico this Texas affectation barely misses being a crime.

"Have you read the *Bugle?*" Caine asked crisply.

Gus tossed the paper on the desk. "Hellfire ain't playin' his Rusty Bugle any sweeter. But he's shore painting Deacon Caine whiter'n a pigeon's wing. What are you promising him to elect you—a free pass in and out of the city treasury?"

"That's not funny, Hardy," Caine remarked. "If you've read the paper you no doubt know I'm taking steps to evict young Williams from his mine in Lake Valley."

"I gathered that. Aiming to file yourself, after you get him off?"

Vance Sheedy, Caine's lawyer, dropped his cigarette and mashed it under a bootsole. Sheedy was a large, loose-built man given to chewing-tobacco and yellow boots.

"Williams' coyote hole isn't worth the price of a pick and shovel to keep up the assessment work," he said. "Being that it's within his own boundary, we couldn't touch it anyway. But he's making himself a nuisance, and he's got to get out. Those blasted dogs of his have been running the Deacon's cattle all summer. And he won't keep them chained up. When they aren't trying to drag down a steer, Williams is setting off a charge that scares all the cattle away from the water."

Caine produced a folded paper with a seal on the front of it. He held it awkwardly between the second and third fingers of his hand, his missing thumb an eloquent argument, Caine himself admitted, against the folly of dally-roping. The ragged stump, hardly a year old, still had an angry red appearance.

"I want this served on him today. And I don't mean next week. We'll be over there tomorrow to help him move out, and if he isn't ready I'll put a stick of Hercules under the outfit and blow it right over the hill."

GUS glanced at the paper and stood up, tucking it inside his coat pocket. Standing, he dominated the office. He reminded folks somewhat of an old graze bull—solid, broad of beam, thick-necked, unhurried. He wore a three-day crop of rusty black whiskers on his tough-hided jaws. His hands were big and meaty, with fingers that appeared stubby and clumsy. But they had a dexterity with pigging string and Colt, and, knotted, they could fell a big man as though a wagon had run over him.

The Deacon was already half out the door when Sheriff Gus called him back. "That'll be ten dollars," he said. "I charge a dollar a mile, on hurry-up cases like this. If you can wait till I get around to it, the price will be four bits."

Deacon Caine paid him, with a smile that was as thin as a blade, and Al Dikes, Caine's Forked S foreman, snorted.

"You'd like to stall around till he gets his assessment work done, wouldn't you?" he remarked. "But he's getting out of there, Hardy. And, confidentially, the Deacon's boosting somebody else out of a place he never had any right being in, and right pronto."

"Don't count them votes till they've been cast," advised Gus. "Dusty has always been a justice-lovin' town, and the voters'll pin this here star on the shirt of the man that'll give 'em the squarest deal."

"That," said Deacon Caine, "is precisely what I'm counting on."

GUS' slow-blinking brown eyes watched Caine and his ramrod leave town on their horses. There was worry in those eyes, and a shadow of sadness, as he leaned hip-shot in the doorway and let his glance move along the street with its small adobe buildings and friendly shade trees.

It was a busy town, if not a bustling one. Ranchers and their women-folk in from outfits along the Poverty, or down from the rougher, timbered Chloride country; easy-going punchers swapping stories in the shade; friendly Mexican herders and farmers standing before the cantina, making their own shade with the enormous sombreros they wore; some pretty town girls chattering as they came along the boardwalk.

Beyond the village Poverty Creek murmured, and the odor of cottonwood leaves rotting in its quiet backwaters was a sharpness and a sweetness on the lazy air. Farther still, the mountains rose in gray-green ranks, streaked with scarlet earth.

Sheriff Gus and Dusty had grown up together. They'd sowed their wild oats when the town was under the mistaken impression that it was a mining center. They'd done a little carousing and a heap of fighting, and maybe some rough romancing.

But they'd grown up. The gold had petered out of the red hills that fenced the town in like a barricade, and Dusty had reformed and become a respectable cow-town. To an extent, Gus had reformed, too. If he fell by the wayside occasionally, it was because he still fancied himself somewhat of a heller with the ladies. What strong drink was to some men, the smile of a red-headed widow was to Gus.

But he had real worries, now. Deacon Sam Caine had ambitions for Dutsy. All of them were intimately tied up with the Deacon's own welfare. He dreamed of bringing a spur up from the Denver and Rio Grande, forty miles east. He saw himself lording half the range within fifty miles. He blew like a March wind about switching over to registered beef, and to hell with these red-necked critters with heads so narrow they could drink out of a milk bottle.

Caine's hold on the town was already being felt. If he got that worn nickel star off Gus' shirt in this week's election he'd have the screws on Dusty for sure. Scruples, with the Deacon, were something to be used with discretion. As sheriff, he could dispense with them entirely.

Sheriff Gus, as he left the office, was not deluding himself that he had an easy fight ahead. He told them Gus hardly ever came in off that ranch of his except to quell the Mexcians' Saturday night brawl in the cantina. Which was true; but why tinker with a windmill that is pumping satisfactorily? Dusty was getting along fine without a bull-necked lawman to jail a harmless cowboy whenever he was having too good a time.

Stopping at the general store, Gus picked up the groceries Minnie had ordered that morning. He took care to get every item on the long list, for his sister had no patience with inefficiency, and her anger partook of hell-fire and brimstone.

He rode the two miles up Poverty Creek to the ranch with the groceries in a muslin sack slung over his shoulder. Leaving his bay mountain pony in the corral, he slipped into the kitchen with the sack, and had stealthily retraced his path as far as the windmill when Minnie's voice came after him like a bullwhip.

"Gus!"

Gus leaned against the derrick, scowling, stoking his pipe while she came after him.

In theory, Minnie's jurisdiction lay within the four walls of the big ranch-house. Actually, it reached to the farthest blind canyon of the forty thousand acres of patented land Gus owned. She was the terror of the cattle buyers who came to trade sharply, and remained to deal with her on her own terms.

She rode on every round-up and kept her own tally books. She supervised the branding and docked punchers for sloppy brands that spoiled a hide for leather. Since the death of her husband ten years ago, Minnie had managed Gus and the ranch in a high-handed manner that smacked of tyranny.

Yet she was not a large woman. She was short and stocky, and as homely, she herself said, as galvanized sin. Some claimed she had the evil eye. It was evil enough for a man trying to lie to her, for she could put a thrust like that of a stiletto into the blue eyes under black brows that flipped up at the ends.

She had a paring knife in her hand as she stood there. "Off chasin' some red-headed widder, eh?" she accused.

Gus for a moment held his peace, puffing the pipe into life. "Got an injunction to serve on Lin Williams," he grunted. "See you later."

"Injunction! What about gettin' my veg'table garden laid by 'fore frost? What about them sixty acres of winter wheat you were going to plant in the trap?"

"I'll git to 'em," Gus said. "This here is in line o' duty."

"I hope to heaven you lose that election," Minnie said bitterly. "It would be the salvation of the ranch. I been carryin' the place on my back so long I'm gettin' bow-legged. What about Lin?"

"Caine's rigged up an injunction to get him off his claim. Too bad. He thought he was going to find nuggets over there big as my right eyeball."

Minnie grunted. "If he'd put as much time in on his ranch as on that coyote hole— Well, if you got to go over, wait until I fix Lin up some eggs."

While she packed the eggs in a carton, she did some thinking. "That mine of Lame Johnny Wilson's just seems to be bad luck for any feller that tackles it," she said presently. "Old Johnny never did make it pay. Smartest thing he ever did was to pull up stakes and disappear. Reckon it's the best thing in the world for Lin anyway. Why don't he stay on his own range and take care of his cattle?"

"Because," Gus said, "there ain't any money to be made on it. He can't afford windmills, and he hasn't an all-year spring on the place."

Minnie's mind veered back to Lame Johnny Wilson. "I never was satisfied that that old man just up and ran away. Only a week before he lit out, he was over here to show me some ore samples. Was going to make a fortune out of it, he claimed."

"Well, he lit out, anyhow. His camp was plumb cleaned out when we rode up to look for him."

"And how about his mine?" There was an edge of sharp interest in her question.

"We cleaned that out ourselves. First off we thought it had caved in on him. But we dug clear back to solid rock and didn't find hide nor hair of him. So it looks plain enough that he set too big a charge and ruined all the work he'd done in a year. He just up and quit."

"No, sir!" Minnie's jaw was as positive as a bulldog's. "If he left this country he was drug out. Lame Johnny Wilson was as honest as he was worthless. I loaned him ten dollars one day to pay his fees on the outfit. And Johnny wouldn't have left Dusty without paying me back."

Gus took the box of eggs and sauntered out. "He borrowed many a chaw of eatin' tobacco without payin' me back," he remarked as he went out the door.

CHAPTER II

MADAME TREACHERY

IT WAS a mile across the ridge from Gus' Rafter Fork Ranch on Poverty Creek to Lake Valley. Here, where converging mountain ranges boxed in a wide grassy park, Emerald Lake furnished water for most of Deacon Caine's cattle. At the south end of the valley rose two blunt, piñon-stippled peaks. It was at the base of the southernmost peak that Lin Williams had his mining outfit. A few rods farther along was the old Lame Johnny glory-hole.

Gus found the camp deserted except for Lin's two friendly bulldogs. A shout into the adit of the tunnel brought the scuff of

boots. Muddy, shirtless, Lin came into the sunlight.

He was a lean youngster brushing six feet, built along the lines of a pine tree, straight up and down, but tough. Lin's hair was blond, his face was brown, his smile was slow.

"How's she comin', son?" Gus asked.

Lin sat on a rocker and wiped his hands on his pants. "Slower'n seven hundred dollars. I've got three feet of assessment work to do in a week. And I'm chippin' porphyry."

Gus glanced at the red welter of rocks and earth Lin had spilled down the slope in the laborious digging of the glory-hole. "Kind of hate to lose this layout, wouldn't you?"

"I've got more hopes pinned to it than to the ranch. I'll never make the ranch go till I get water. And they ain't sinking wells for nothing. If I could just find a little color here—"

"Lin," Gus said bluntly, "this ain't easy to say. But I've got a cease-and-desist to serve on you."

Lin straightened, his blue eyes whetting angrily. "Deacon Caine?"

"The Deacon. He's claiming that your bulldogs have dogied a lot of his cattle. That your dynamiting keeps the cattle from drinking."

"I'm on my own land," snapped Lin. "The dogs are too lazy to run a leppy, and I don't set off more'n one charge a week."

"You can probably show that in court."

"But if I have to get off now, I'm licked before I start. I'll lose the claim in seven days for not keeping up my assessment work. Some yahoo will file here before I'm allowed to refile."

Gus Hardy stood and fooled with the half-filled gun-belts that made an X low on his ample stomach. "Do you reckon she'd be much of a loss?"

Lin rolled a wheat-straw cigarette. "I've got a lot of work sunk here, Gus. And I have a hunch I'll find something one of these days to more than pay me back." He frowned, then, and his glance sought Gus. "Why do you reckon Sam Caine's so anxious to get me off? He don't want this two-bit mine claim. Yet he's plumb panting to see me go back across the hill and run cattle."

"It whips me," Gus admitted. "Speakin' frank, you couldn't give me this outfit. I've seen too many gents dig like pack rats in these hills, and for nothin'. You take Lame Johnny Wilson—after six months' work here, he pulled up stakes and lit a shuck. Not a word to nobody. Plumb disgusted."

Lin eyed him narrowly. "You believe that?"

"He didn't crawl into no hole and pull it in after himself. Not this hole, anyway. I was one of the boys that cleaned the hole out to make sure."

Lin said slowly, his words pointed with importance, "Somewhere in these hills Lame Johnny's laying dead. Murdered. He'd been poking around these parts too long to light a shuck. Somebody wanted him out of here."

Gus craned forward, mouth open. It was evident Lin had thought it all out and only wanted urging to go on. "Who?" he asked.

"Deacon Caine. Why? I don't know. But it all adds up. Lame Johnny gets run out. Then me. Caine is afraid to have anybody digging in here."

Gus Hardy sat back. He was looking off across the green meadow at Emerald Lake. There were two deep puckers between his eyes.

"You're too young to remember this," he said. "But I 'mind when Caine moved in here. A gent named Jones used to own your spread, and he was making five thousand a year on it."

"He should have been pulling rabbits out of hats," said Lin. "He was a magician."

"No, it was easy. You see, Emerald Lake and Lake Valley used to be part of the spread you own. According to the original land grant, the Deacon's south boundary runs along a line sighted from Cap Rock to the old Spanish mine at the base of Twin Peak."

"There's two Twin Peaks," said Lin. "South Twin and North Twin. And no Spanish mine at the foot of either one."

"That's what I'm getting at. Somehow we always just took it to mean South Twin Peak. Everybody who'd lived here accepted it that way. Then Caine came in. He bought the Forked S and right away put up a holler that Lake Valley was his, according to the old grant. He dug up an abstract at the land office, and danged if he didn't convince the court that there was a question whether Lake Valley belonged to him or this man Jones!

"All the deed said was, 'A line running from Cap Rock to the old Spanish mine at the base of Twin Peak, shall constitute the southern boundary.' Well, when that was wrote there probably was only one mine and everybody knew what it meant. But nowadays there's no mine to be seen. And Caine trotted the land agent out one day and showed him some rock pictures on North Twin that were sure-'nough Spanish mine marks. So the court gave him Lake Valley and Jones got a kick in the britches."

Lin drew a long, slow breath. "Gus, I wish you'd told me that before. It might have given me something to work on. But it's too late, now, because that paper finishes me."

Gus was grubbing in a saddle-bag. "Well, if this don't beat—! Look a' here, son. Them eggs Minnie sent over got all tangled up with that paper. And now I don't reckon either of 'em's much use to anybody."

He held up a paper which was limp as a rag, soaked in scrambled eggs.

Under the brown flesh of Lin's face his color deepened. "Now, ain't that a shame! How come you didn't carry them eggs in a box?"

"Well, I started thataway, but the box got too clumsy to hold, so I just put 'em into the saddle-bag, real careful. Deacon Caine ain't going to like this, Lin. Because it will be two weeks before he can have a new paper sent up from the courthouse in Beaverhead."

Gus swung his bulk into the old Tipton tree, and Lin grinned up and said, "Thanks, Gus."

"You might just bear it in mind when votin' time comes, day after tomorrow, Gus told him. "I'll need every ballot I can get."

"I'll be there. I'll vote every fifteen minutes till they catch me."

GUS followed the scallops of Emerald Greek down to where it joined the Poverty. As he rode his mind worked, stolidly, metered to the slow plod of the horse's hoofs. When trouble roared and shook its fist in his face, it was Sheriff Gus' fashion to put a wall of pipe smoke between himself and this bombast, pick out one aspect of the ruckus, and view it thoughtfully from all angles.

The point he now chose to consider was the old mystery of which peak was the right peak—North Twin or South Twin. In due course his thoughts rambled to the abstract of the debated Lake Valley tract; and Gus suddenly looked up to find he had rambled almost to the doorstep of the land office itself.

He dismounted, and was on the point of entering the small, tin-roofed building when he noticed with a start that the afternoon was well along. Evening was gath-

ering in the east, and as far as he knew his lone prisoner, Juan Guerrero, sleeping off a gallon of *vino rojo,* has not yet had lunch. Old Ben Mooney, his jailer, often forgot such matters while puzzling out a chess problem at the Stockmen's Rest.

At the door of the jail a finger of warning touched his spine coldly. Perfume! Who in his jail would be using perfume? He stood in the portal, head shoved forward, small eyes traveling about the room. Then, in a dusky corner, he saw her.

Small, shapely, trim as a yearling colt in her gray traveling dress and poke bonnet, she stood up to meet him. And even in the poor light it was apparent that her hair was glistening auburn.

"Sheriff Hardy? I'm Mary Nichols," she said quietly. "I've been waiting. They said you'd be back."

Gus gravely shook hands with her, trying to place her. She was not a Dusty girl. She might be the new girl the Double Eagle had imported recently as a singer of tear-starting ballads. "What can I do for you?" he asked her.

There were troubled shadows in her eyes. Trouble that her words only hinted at. "I just came in on the stage today. I—I need your help, Sheriff."

A red-headed girl, and in trouble. Gus' big heart softened to the consistency of butter left in the sun. He pulled the chair near his desk, seated the girl, and set across the littered desk from her. He leaned forward, putting into his voice the solicitude of a doctor drawing information from a patient.

"Now, what's the trouble, little lady?"

The girl fussed nervously with her handbag. "It's not easy to tell. You see, I'm a widow"—her eyes were raised briefly, dropped when she saw the almost maudlin expression of sympathy on his face—"and things have not been easy since my husband died. That was two months ago. Joe was always a traveling sort. He was forever off to some mining camp or other. But less than a year ago he struck some color and sold the claim for seven thousand dollars."

"Then," Sheriff Gus objected, "I should think you'd have been took care of when he died."

"As I should have been. But, Sheriff, Joe didn't have a cent of that money when he died!"

Gus' spine tingled, scenting mystery in the way her dark eyes flashed, the way she pressed forward. His breath came faster, his eyes narrowed. "What happened to it?" he asked huskily.

Mary Nichols' slim shoulders shrugged. "Joe hid it. He told me the story when he died. He had all the money in currency when he left Beaverhead—"

"Beaverhead! That's just thirty miles west o' here."

"I know that. He had hardly left town when he realized he was being followed. He had to ride hard to make it to Dusty without being overtaken. And then—Sheriff, do you remember a young man, a blond young man, who got into a fight in the saloon and had to be put in jail overnight? It was about six months ago."

Gus thought back. "Well, now, I reckon I've had about fourteen blond young men in the *jusgado* for fightin' since last winter. And some of them just travelin' through, I recollect."

"And my Joe was one of them!" Mary Nichols exclaimed. "Joe deliberately got himself jailed. Then he pried an adobe brick out of the wall, scooped out a little hole in the brick, put his money inside it, and replaced the brick. So that when he left town in the morning he wasn't carrying any of it to be robbed of."

Gus watched her stand up, his brain aching with the suddenness with which the mystery had suddenly been thrust into his own lap. "Two months ago Joe reached home," the girl concluded. "He took pneumonia just afterward and—and died. As soon as I could overcome my grief I came. I need the money, Sheriff. If it's still there—"

Gus took the key-ring from the wall. He said grimly, "Did he say which cell it was, ma'am?"

"Cell Four."

Gus opened the last cell in the small block. Mary Nichols hung back when he stood aside to let her enter. "I'd rather not," she murmured. "You understand—Joe—"

Sheriff Gus patted her arm. He stepped inside. Mary Nichols watched him hunker at the base of the wall, in one corner, and begin to probe with a pocket-knife. Then from her bag she extracted a short length of lead pipe. She went quickly across the cell and brought it down with all the force of a slim arm upon Gus' scantily-plewed head.

Gus quietly slumped to a sitting posture and leaned against the wall. And just as quietly he went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

THEY'RE COUNTING VOTES IN HELL

IN HIS black cavern of lethargy Gus floundered about helplessly, repeatedly banging his head into a stone wall. At each impact of his skull with the rocky abuttment an explosion was set off inside his brain.

At length he awoke. Dimly, beyond the confines of the jail, he thought he heard gunfire. Sheriff Gus came to his feet and clung to the bars of the window. Across the street, a clear hundred feet away, he saw a masked man at the door of the land office. He had a scattergun in his hands, and in one hand he held the reins of two ponies. The street was deserted.

Sheriff Gus' hands slapped down upon his holsters—and found both empty. He roared a curse and turned from the window to charge the door. In letters a foot high, printed across his brain, he saw the story of Mary Nichols' treachery. The stout pine-panel, strap-iron-reinforced, hurled him back with aching bones.

Again the peacemaker attacked the door and now panic entered him and he began to hammer it with both fists.

"Lemme out of here, goldarn you!" he shouted. "Lemme out or I'll—"

There answered him only the sodden, maundering voice of Juan Guerrero. "*Hijo de cabron!* How ees a man to sleep weeth you yell' and holler'?"

Through the window floated the sudden whirl and chop of hoofs. Again Gus Hardy ran to the window. He watched the horses, their saddles filled, now, lope up the street and splash across Poverty Creek.

He saw faces appear in windows, men come from doorways.

He watched small knots of excited men form and swiftly mass into a single, vociferous group. And the sound of his own name struck his eardrums: "Gus Hardy! Where in tophet is he?"

Then he did the thing that must certainly cost him the election. He returned to the barred window and shouted, "Right here! I'm locked in Cell Four."

Hellfire Martin was at the head of the group that came to free him. Present also were Vance Sheedy and Al Dikes. Martin had the keys. Unlocking the door, he stood there in the portal looking like a lanky, red-bearded prophet of doom.

"Locked into your own jail, eh, while the land office is gutted and the agent beat half to death! What's the answer?"

Sheriff Gus pressed both fists to his slogging temples. "I was tricked," he groaned. "I tried to help out a lady, and, consarn me, she turned on me like a bobcat."

"Not," said Hellfire sarcastically, "a red-headed widder, by any chance?" Hellfire was a lanky man in his sixties, his body high-shouldered and stooped, his face thin and sallow, made longer by a red goatee. When he was being sarcastic his eyes glowed like green vitriol.

Gus' face told him he had blundered onto the truth. Vance Sheedy, who seldom

missed a trick, came in now with an explosive syllable of disgust.

"I hope you gents can see what's happened! Hardy accepted money to let himself be locked in his own jail. Malfeasance of public office, I call it!"

Hellfire cocked an eye at him. "What did he do it for?"

"It's obvious, ain't it? Caine put Lin Williams off his claim today. Williams is looking for revenge. He's talked for a year about Caine grabbing Lake Valley, when it really belongs to him. I'll bet dollars to corral apples the only thing missing from the land office is the abstract of the Forked S Iron!"

Gus grabbed the lawyer by the front of his shirt. "You're almighty sure of what we'll find there! Shore you wasn't one of the men that robbed the place?"

But this attempt to derail the train of guilt upon which he was a helpless passenger drew only a quick flash of guilt from Vance Sheedy; then Al Dikes laughed harshly.

"You're shootin' in the dark, Hardy. You're finished. We're going down and have a look into the land office, and if we find out Vance is tellin' it right— Well, boys, I reckon the election ain't all he'll lose!"

His glance called up thought of scaffolds and penitentiary bars. Gus shivered as if with a chill, and they left the jail.

SIX-GUN lead had sufficed to shoot the padlock off the massive iron-and-oak safe.

On shelves in the back of the safe were ranged abstracts of all the plots of land in the section, each abstract being a book nearly the size of a Bible. Thus, the space from which a single abstract had been filched gaped like a missing tooth.

Hellfire pulled out the books on each side. "'Lin Williams' Ranch'," he read. "'Commonly known as the Bar Seven'." He squinted at the title of the second book. "'Gus Hardy Ranch, otherwise called the Rafter Fork'."

Hellfire replaced the volumes and slowly turned to face the silent group in the office. "There we are. Nothing missing but the Deacon's title. What are we going to do with a polecat like this, boys? Suppose it was you he was trying to ruin!"

Al Dikes had been prepared for this moment, and his gun-barrel now caved through Gus' Stetson and creased him heavily on the side of the head. The sheriff sank down, groaning, hearing through heavy folds of wool, it seemed, the muffled talk about him.

"Haul him back to jail, boys." That was Sheedy's voice, full of sly triumph. "We'll talk to Judge Smith about the charge to hold him on. I hope you'll remember this when you cast your votes day after tomorrow."

"They'll remember," promised Hellfire. "If the Dusty *Bugle's* voice counts for anything. "Lemme out of here, now. I've got an editorial to write."

"Gonna write it in blood, Hellfire?" someone called after the printer.

"No!" Martin called back. "Pizening wolves calls for arsenic!"

Ben Mooney, Gus' jailer, brought his dinner about eight o'clock. He brought news, too, which served to take what appetite the lawman had left.

"Judge Smith says the charge is aidin' an' abettin', malfeasance, and acceptin' a bribe. Bail's pegged at three hundred dollars."

"Is that all I'm worth?" Sheriff Gus grinned.

The watery-eyed jailer scratched his neck." The Deacon tried to get him to make it a thousand. Likewise he said——" Ben Mooney swallowed, scratched his neck again. "He said it's the law that you got to give up your badge while you're in jail."

"You tell him," Gus said huskily, "to come over and take it off himself. Minnie know about this?"

"One of the boys rode down and told her. He told me when he came back that Minnie says it's a good thing you're in jail, or she'd be out gunnin' for you herself."

"Always kiddin'," Gus chuckled hollowly.

But he waited, staring out the window, until the town fell into darkness, lamp by lamp. Minnie did not come to bail him out. Lin did not come to see him. Sheriff Gus Hardy, who had brought Dusty up from its slobbering infancy, had been forgotten by that town. It wanted only a landslide of votes on Caine's ticket to complete his disgrace.

LATE the next morning he saw a rider, driving three Jersey milk cows, come into town. He could not discover the identity of this rider, but after nearly an hour Ben Mooney clumped down the hall to unlock the door of Gus' cell.

"You're out on bail," he grunted. "Don't carry no guns and don't get in no squabbles, or you'll be back here pronto."

Gus scratched his whiskered cheek with stubby fingers. "Who went my bail?"

"Stick your head in the office and see."

Gus walked into the office, into the full glare of Minnie's eyes. She was in her work clothes—denim pants, jumper, her black hair done up in a knot on top. She was seated on the edge of the desk, slapping her boot with a pigging string.

"You old fool!" she said heavily. "I always knowed you'd come to grief some day, and I had a feelin' it would be over some red-headed widder. What'd you want to get into something like this for?"

"It was sorta forced on me," Gus defended. "You see, this she-devil told me—"

"I've already heard the story. I ain't going to listen to your lyin' version of it."

Gus got his hat off the deer antler above his desk and fooled with the brim. "Where did you get the money to go my bail?" he asked finally.

"Seen me bring in my milk cows, didn't you? I made Judge Smith allow me a hundred on each. And if one of them beasts goes dry in all the excitement, so help me, Gus, you'll pay for it the rest of your life!"

Gus sloshed on his flat-crowned Stetson. "I reckon it ain't all I'll spend the rest of my declinin' years payin' for." He hung there a moment, undecided. Then he headed for the door. "Well, thanks, Minnie. I'll prob'ly be home for supper."

"You bet your life you'll be home for supper! We're goin' down to Hellfire Martin's, now, and you're going to post notice of your withdrawal from the election. Then you're coming home with me and put in a big fall workin'."

The lone spark of pride remaining in Gus' soul flared up. "No, sir!" he declared. "I'm fightin' this through, if I cast the only vote for myself in Dusty. I was framed, I tell you! And I aim to find the snake that framed me before I chouse another cow."

Sheriff Gus rode down the street, and it was like running a gauntlet. But shame was less a part of his mental state than was anger. He thought with a stab of fury of Mary Nichols and her treachery. A simple trick, but sufficient to jolt him loose of a star and perhaps put him in jail.

Obviously, she was not working alone. Someone had paid her to do it, and Gus was certain enough that it was Deacon Caine to be ready to tangle with him on sight.

The certainty deepened that the Deacon was feverishly working to protect his Lake Valley range from investigation of any

kind. It was significant that Gus had been on the way to look over the abstract when it was stolen.

Whatever was back of it, he felt there was more to be learned up at the mine than in town. He reached the diggings early in the afternoon.

Of Lin, he found no sign. He shouted. Lin's bulldogs wagged their tails in friendly curiosity.

Apprehension put a tension in Gus' muscles; today was Caine's deadline. Gus had not told the cowman that he had failed to serve the notice. And yet the camp showed no evidence of the Deacon's putting Lin off by force.

As a last resort, he went a short distance into the drift. "Lin!" he bawled. "You in there?"

His words came back to him from a great distance, garbled, hollow. An odor struck his nostrils. With the cool mustiness of it a chill entered him. There was, in that odor, something ancient.

Gus threw a rock. The tunnel was only forty-odd feet long, but the stone seemed to roll endlessly down a long drift.

In the tool-box he found a candle. This he lighted, and entered the mine. At a distance of perhaps fifty feet he encountered Lin's pick and shovel and a wheelbarrow.

He looked farther and saw the roof come down roughly to meet the floor. Then this was the end of the drift; he had only imagined that he heard the stone roll farther.

Or—Gus squinted, catching a breath—was there a hole about the size of a man's body at the end of the drift!

On hands and knees, he peered through the small adit. He thrust the candle into the opening; and what he saw was a long corridor with rough timbering that was gray with age stretching away from him. Timbering so rough that the tunnel could only have been thrust into the hill by the Spaniards themselves!

Chapter IV

A DEAD MAN CASTS HIS BALLOT

GUS HARDY was big, and he had a big man's fear of tight places. But he also had a big man's unwillingness to let danger slow him down.

So into the tunnel he crammed his bulk, and came through blowing like a grampus. The air was dry in here; it smelled warm and rank, sharp with an odor that was not pleasant. To the right the tunnel sloped down; it climbed rather sharply to the left, and Gus started up the drift with his candle held before him, knowing the entrance to the mine would probably be on a higher level.

He came to a sharp turn and, rounding it, saw a lamp glowing not far ahead. Gus shouted.

"Lin! Whatever from hell—"

Lin Williams had been kneeling beside something on the floor of the tunnel. Now he scrambled to his feet and faced Gus, and his hand made a jerky motion toward his gun. When he recognized the lawman he relaxed, his hand dropping from the Colt.

"Gus!" he said. "Thank God it was you. If I'd been alone here another five minutes with—with this, I think I'd have gone crazy."

Sheriff Gus had his mouth fixed to say, "What you got there?" when he saw the thing on the floor, and his stomach fluttered and his knees rattled like castanets. He took two steps forward. "Lame Johnny Wilson!" he croaked.

Lame Johnny sat with his back against the wall, a reedy looking old man with a stringy gray beard and a bald head. He wore his faded blue shirt and the bleached-out blue denim pants, and oft-mended trail boots. He looked as natural as life; but there was something oddly unlife-like about him.

His face was brown as a penny, and the flesh of it was stretched like a drumhead

over the sharp bones beneath; and the fingers that clutched a Colt, resting upon his lap, were like a buzzard's claws, so that Gus knew Lame Johnny was a mummy.

Lin was talking in a whisper. "Don't you see it, Gus? Look at that rock-slide up yonder. That's the old entrance, but a fault must have slipped and shut it off."

"You mean—he got walled up in here?" In Gus' midriff, horror still beat its wings against the walls of his stomach.

"Not till he was dead. He's holdin' a Colt, ain't he? And looka here—" With a forefinger he pulled back Johnny's shirt and disclosed a small hole in his breast. "Johnny run his own little shaft plumb into this old Spanish mine. Somewhere near here the entrance must be covered up with rocks and brush so nobody's seen it in a hundred years. Somebody else found out that he'd stumbled into it. So Johnny had to be killed. You see why, don't you?"

Gus said grimly, "Because this is South Twin Peak, and the Spanish mine is supposed to be in North Twin. It cuts Sam Caine off without water or his best range. So the Deacon killed him. But, Lin—how we going to prove that?"

Lin Williams held out his hand, and on the flattened palm was something even more horrible than the sight of Lame Johnny in the role of a mummy, and this time Gus nearly lost his lunch. He went green as Roquefort cheese; but he managed to husk, "I reckon that clinches 'er, kid!"

"But its got to be handled right," Lin muttered, "or else we're apt to end up like Johnny did. We're going to enlist Hellfire Martin's help."

"We'll get no help there. He's likely printing an editorial right now, to grease the skids under me in tomorrow's votin'."

Lin pocketed the thing he held and bent over the mummy. "Gimme a hand, here. We're taking Johnny down to Dusty. I got some ideas."

Hellfire Martin had a stick half full of type in his hand when they entered that night, just after dark. His long face, pointed with the scraggled red beard, was satanic in the up-flare of a lamp. He put down the type and picked up a mallet, and said tightly:

"If you're lookin' for a busted head, Gus Hardy, you've come to the right place."

Gus picked up a proof sheet and glanced at it before replying. "I'm looking for a man to do some printing for me," he said finally. "Thought maybeso you'd like to help out."

Martin squinted at him. "You're drunk."

Lin Williams shut the door and leaned back against it, his Frontier Colt coming easily into his hand. "We thought this might help to persuade you."

Hellfire's face turned scarlet. He started to answer, choked, and held onto the composing stone for support. "You're both crazy!" he snarled.

"Nope. Sane, sober and determined," said Sheriff Gus. He extracted the printer's gun from its holster. "Get hold of yourself, Hellfire, and start settin' this up: 'To the citizens of Dusty:—' " Suddenly he jammed the gun into Martin's stomach. "Will you git that silly look off your face and start slingin' type?"

Hellfire seized a stick. He jammed in a lead, planted himself before a type-case and gave Gus a final glare. "You're givin' orders now, Hardy, but I'll see you run out of Dusty on a rail before I'm through. And don't think anything you make me print will make one vote's difference in the election."

"I sorta feel like it might, Hellfire. Here we go: 'The Gus Hardy For Sheriff Club wishes to announce a free exhibit in front of the *Bugle* office at eight A. M. today. Shake hands with an old friend, Johnny Wilson, who is backing Sheriff Hardy one hundred percent!"

"Lame Johnny Wilson's back?" Hellfire demanded.

"In the flesh," said Lin. "Now, take a

proof of that and we'll find a spot for it."

Gus glanced at a lengthy, paid advertisement praising Deacon Sam Caine on the front page; he loosened the coigns and dumped the type comprising it into the hell-box. Hellfire swore.

"The Deacon paid me a hundred dollars to put that in. She's got to run!"

Gus shook his head. "The Deacon will understand."

From the window, Lin turned sharply. "The Deacon and Al Dikes are coming right now!"

"Put your gun up," Gus drawled. "Keep a-workin', Hellfire. But remember I'm right here, and if you go to shootin' off your mouth too much I'll put a slug right through your guts. I might as well be hung for a killer as a grafter."

Caine gave a start when he saw the pair in the office. Al Dikes' tawny eyes shuttled uncertainly from face to face.

"What is this?" Caine growled. "You ain't very particular about the company you keep these days, Hellfire."

The remark slid off Gus's back. "Martin's doing a little printing job for me. I'm still in the race, Deacon."

The cowman gave a snort. He brushed by the newspaper man and glanced at the damp proof sheet. Then his gaze slipped to the page of type laid out on the grimy gray surface of the stone. He stabbed a finger of his crippled hand at the empty box.

"Where's my ad?"

"Had to make room somewheres for mine," Gus told him.

DEACON SAM CAINE stood quite still, breathing through splayed nostrils. His left hand rubbed at the black butt of his .44, his thumbless right hand hanging. "Let's get this straight now, before any of us does anything he might regret later on. You've torn out my ad, Hellfire, to make room for Hardy's?"

Gus himself answered. "It's what you call freedom of the press. Didn't seem right not to let the town in on my big news."

Caine's voice, his manner, his face, were starchy with suspicion. "What news?"

"Lame Johnny Wilson's back," Gus said simply.

The sound of Dikes catching a breath was a sharp sibilance. But the lanky features of the Deacon changed only to a mockery of polite inquiry.

"So? Where is he?"

"Down at the saloon havin' a drink. Why don't you go say hello to him. Ask him why he up and left his mine so sudden, Deacon."

Caine suggested quietly, "Suppose we step outside a minute."

Gus went out the door with him, and Caine said carefully, in the darkness: "I want no trouble with you. I've got the election cinched, and I won't be stopped by any hare-brained stunt you may pull off at the last minute. You understand—nothing is going to stop me. But I'll make it easy for you to back down, Hardy. I'll see that this land-office business is hushed up; and I'll pay you five hundred dollars to withdraw tonight."

Gus opened the door, standing broad and smiling in the column of light. "That's right open-handed of you. But I've already promised Lame Johnny that I wouldn't back out. See you at the polls."

After he had closed the door, Sheriff Gus acted quickly, pulling down the shades and stepping swiftly to the back door. "Keep an eye on him, Lin," he said. "I'll bring Johnny in out of the wagon."

Hellfire Martin got only a glimpse of the canvas-shrouded body Gus carried in; but he sniffed sharply at the odor that soon permeated the office.

"What in tarnation!" he grunted. "Smells like something—"

"Don't say it," Gus cautioned. " 'Rotten' is a bad word, and Johnny wouldn't like you talkin' thataway about him."

Hellfire stopped with mallet upraised

over a block of type; and he was still in this attitude when the bullet crashed through the window, carrying glass into the room in a swarm of shining, deadly little spears. The shade, ripped to tatters, came down with a crash. Gus hurled a wrench at the lamp and in the darkness threw open the door and lay on the floor just inside, firing the .45 he had taken from Hellfire.

He saw, in that first, flashing moment, three spurts of gunflame at vantage points across the street. He fired at one and heard a man cry out. There was no more fire from this point, but from a corral down the street lead whirled into the open door.

As suddenly as it had begun, the attack ceased. No more guns betrayed themselves by stripes of yellow in the street's blackness. Gus took a blanket from Hellfire's cot and hung it over the broken window before he lighted a lamp.

In white-lipped fury, Hellfire looked at the shambles of his office. Type-cases were overturned, a can of benzine punctured, a stack of newsprint chewed by a bullet.

"Your pard, the Deacon, ain't such a good shot, is he?" Gus remarked. "You'd a' thought he could a' done better than that if he really wanted to put me out of the way."

Hellfire did not reply. But his face was a mixture of bewildered conjecture as he went back to work.

The night wore out in peace after this. Temporarily shorn of his legal power, Gus let the town worry out the puzzle of the brief gun-battle itself. He and Lin slept in shifts, and about dawn they took bundles of Dusty *Bugles* around to the saloons and business houses and left stacks where they would be found early. Then they returned to prepare for the show.

THEY had advertised the exhibit for eight o'clock, but by seven-thirty the street was filling with curious townsmen. Gus and Lin waited inside the shop, picking out the men in the crowd they had been waiting for. The Deacon showed up late; Al Dikes, his hand bandaged, came shortly before him with Vance Sheedy.

When the crowd was beginning to stir impatiently, Gus gave the signal and they went out the back way. A moment later they came around the corner on a buckboard and worked into the crowd. Lame Johnny Wilson sat on the box between them.

Gus felt the hostility of the watchers like a pressure as he stood up and raised both hands for silence. "I promised you'd get to shake hands with Johnny Wilson," he told the men. "And here he is. Just back from a little trip. Gents, step up and shake!"

Lame Johnny had many a friend in the town. A swarm of men pressed forward, and one of them mounted the hub of the off wagon-wheel and reached for the old miner's hand.

Then he saw the Colt in Wilson's fist. He fell back with a startled oath. Gus Hardy chuckled. "Johnny won't hurt you," he said.

The man came close again, to stare into the brown face of the weird figure. He let out a yell that had the shrillness of terror. "He's dead! My Gawd—it's a mummy!"

The effect on the crowd was to shock them, to stir their curiosity; but after that came resentment at the grim joke Sheriff Gus had played them. Gus had to shout them down before he could say his piece.

"I know it ain't any way to treat the dead," he admitted. "But puttin' bullet holes in an old man ain't any way to treat him, either!" He yanked back the faded shirt, exhibiting the death wound of the old miner.

Someone cried, "Where'd you find him?"

"Lin Williams found him." Gus looked over the crowd, noting that Deacon Caine and his cronies were well back on the rim of it. "You can all go up to the mine today and check on what I'm telling you. Lin

dug through into the old Spanish mine you've all heard of What he found was pore old Johnny shot to hell, a gun still gripped in his fist.

"I guess we all know what this means. Deacon Sam Caine is running cattle in Lake Valley on the assumption that the old Spanish mine is in North Twin Peak. This proves it's in South Twin. And it gives the land and the lake to Lin Williams."

"But how about Johnny?" a cowboy demanded. "Who shot him—and why?"

Gus said calmly, "Well, who would shoot him? Who stood to lose by him telling Lin Williams what he'd found? Who'd want his mouth stopped bad enough to murder him and dynamite the mine to hide what he'd found?"

Attention drew to the Deacon, where he stood leaning against a hitchrack behind the crowd. "You're a lying coward, Hardy," said the Deacon. "And I don't reckon there's a man here will blame me if I put a slug right between your eyes."

"Neither do I," Gus replied; "unless I prove what I'm saying. And here's my proof." He tossed something that was brown and curled, like a claw, to a rancher. "Pass it around, boys. Take a good look. It's something the Deacon left behind after he murdered Johnny Wilson."

Several men had examined it before a puncher gasped: "It's a thumb!"

Gus stabbed an arm at the Deacon. "He didn't lose that finger takin' dallies on a bull, gents. That's the thumb that Lame Johnny Wilson shot off him when he was murdered. We found that in the tunnel ten feet from the mummy!"

IT WAS not a moment in which to be careless. But Gus had been careless in taking his eyes off the Deacon and his boys for a moment. He saw a whirl of movement beyond the crowd, heard a Colt bark, and felt the pluck of lead.

Deacon Caine, Al Dikes, and Vance Sheedy were already a-saddle. Caine was at an alley mouth, but he lingered to throw down a second time on the lawman. The crowd was spilling in every direction, struggling to get out of the line of fire.

Then, high and shrill over the deeper tone of men's voices, a woman yelled: "No, you don't, Sam Caine! Hoist your hands, or—"

Caine swerved in the saddle, bringing the gun in line with a figure in red and white gingham on the boardwalk. The woman's eye was cold and steady behind the barrel of a Winchester; a black knot of hair sat atop her head like a door-knob.

"Minnie, you consarned fool!"

Gus Hardy yelled and fired at the same instant, but Minnie had pressed the trigger a moment sooner. Caine was knocked out of the saddle by the impact of a hollow-nosed .30-30 slug.

Al Dikes and Vance Sheedy sought to use the moment of confusion as a smoke-screen for their own escape. But Gus had his sights on the mouth of the alley as they sprinted for it. He fired twice; at each shot a man left the saddle like a clay pipe snapped off.

There was silence, thick and heavy. As the last echo died, Gus jumped down off the wagon and went through the crowd to Minnie. They heard him start to lay down the law about a woman's interfering in his peacemaking; but Minnie was not silent long.

"You can't take care of yourself any better than you can run a ranch," she complained. "I got a mind to take this sheriff's job over, put you in gingham, and let you do the cookin' for a spell. Now, find your hoss and get home."

Sheriff Gus wagged his head. "You're the hard-heartedest female that ever sliced an onion without sheddin' a tear," he said bitterly. "One of these days the worm is going to turn."

But for the present it was Gus who turned, obediently, and hunted up his horse.

In the next issue

Short Stories for Nov. 10th

Part I of a new and grand serial

A boy of the woods country hears—

NEW RIVERS CALLING

by

James B. Hendryx

DEACON JONES, they called him; that was because his father was a missionary—yes, to the Japanese. The old man said the only way to manage the Japs was to beat hell out of them. And Deacon Jones was one of those boys that always did what his father said.

But first off, he joined the air force.

ADMIRAL YAMAMOTO'S PRIVATE PLANE

A novelette in the next issue by

Andrew A. Caffrey

★★★

JAPANESE SANDMAN

By NORBERT DAVIS

American Luck the Japanese Call It; Sometimes They Add Dumb Luck!

I

IT WAS, according to those who should know, an Early California Colonial Ranch Bungalow with a miniature picket fence and one three-year-old artificially hopped-up pepper tree in a front lawn complete with an automatic sprinkler system. It was also, in case you have never visited California, a small home that was neat and dignified and individual and worthy of its owner's pride.

Morris Harley came in very late for him —9:30—and coasted the truck into the garage and then tip-toed up the pressed gravel drive to the glassed-in rear porch and through it to the neat Pullman-style kitchen.

"Honey—" he said in a theatrical undertone.

"Oh, Honey."

"Morrey."

Morris tip-toed, a little more confidently now, through the breakfast room—not nook—and across the living room, dining

room, parlor—all one—to the master's bedroom and opened the door.

"How do you feel, Honey?"

"Oh, rotten. I've been whoopsing all day. Just all day without stopping, Morrey. I feel awfully glick. Morrey, I'm not going to be one of those dumb ones we've laughed about, am I? I'm not going to want strawberries with lobster sauce, please, do you think?"

"No, Honey," said Morris. He came closer to the bed, feeling his way cautiously in the darkness. "But—but can I get you anything else?"

"Oh, *Morrey,* you fool! You're scared!"

"I'm not!" said Morris. "Well, all right, I am. Yes, sir. I'm damned scared. Please, Honey. Is—is there anything I can do?"

"Morrey, Morrey, did you worry about me today? All day—when you were out running your little truck?"

"My God!" said Morris.

Virginia Harley laughed and laughed. "Oh, Morrey! I'm all right. I'm just being a softy. That's our trouble, haven't you heard? We're too soft. Here I've got a good practical nurse and housekeeper and a doctor and a clinic that we've saved for. And just think of all the wonderful strong peasant women who have their children at the end of one furrow and go on and plow the next."

"You stop saying things like that," Morris said miserably.

"Oh, Morrey! *You* stop worrying! Now go and have your dinner. I told Doris just how to leave it for you. The chopped steak is in the frying pan with the right amount of grease—please, Morrey, don't put any more in—and the potatoes are all sliced right beside it, and there are some grated carrots and a half-head of lettuce. Oh! O-o-oh!"

Morris had got halfway—ten paces—to the kitchen, nodding in the automatic and long-suffering way of all husbands, when he heard that last. Exactly a second later he was beating on the bathroom door.

"Honey! *Honey!* Are you all right?"

"Shut up and go away."

"*Honey*! Shall I call the doctor?"

"Morrey, if you dare— Go and eat your dinner and behave yourself!"

II

IT WAS very late now—or very early—and the false dawn was poking its wan, thin fingers through the slats of the Venetian blinds.

"Yes," said Morris Harley, starting suddenly awake, blind with sleep. "Yeah, Honey."

He reached out automatically, fumbling for the electric alarm clock, and it wasn't there.

His fingers slid along smooth, hard-twill khaki trousers.

"What?" said Morris. "What—"

"Yes."

"My God," said Morris, not believing for a moment that he was really awake. "It's old Pingo-Pongo."

"Sit up very slowly, please. Hands on the outside of the covers. Both hands."

"What?" said Morris. "This is—"

"No," said old Pingo-Pongo. "This is not a dream. You are seeing me, and I am here, and this is a gun."

Morris swallowed hard. "You talk—much better than you did at the pit."

"I find it convenient to do so."

Morris swallowed again. "I thought—thought you were — I mean, when you didn't come to work any more, we all thought you were in a camp with the other Japs—"

"I'm afraid you under-estimated me," said Pingo-Pongo.

"Yes," said Morris sincerely. "My God, yes."

Pingo-Pongo chuckled. "Thank you. It is really a compliment to me." He was smiling, but his teeth did not protrude, and he did not hiss his s's or roll his r's, and he did not bow. He was as sleek and deadly as a cobra, and not any more near-

sighted. "Did I deceive you to that extent?"

"Yes," said Morris numbly. "I thought you were just a funny little guy trying to get along."

"How humorous," said Pingo-Pongo. "It is like my name. That is a joke, too. Your fellow workers and drivers explained it to me. They could not pronounce heathen languages and names, so they called me Pingo-Pongo. Isn't that immensely funny?"

"Well—" said Morris.

"What?" said Virginia drowsily. "What, Morrey?"

Pingo-Pongo had a fat, short .38 special revolver, and he put it right up against Morris Harley's nose. Pingo-Pongo was smiling. He was quite amused.

Morris made his voice work. "It's nothing, Honey. I guess I was having a nightmare. Go back to sleep."

"Why?" asked Pingo-Pongo.

Virginia rolled over carefully. "What did you— *Morrey!*"

"Honey," said Morris. "It's all right. Everything is under control. This is a fella that used to work with me at the gravel pit. He—he's a Chinese fella."

"She is your wife," said Pingo-Pongo, "and no doubt you are the best judge in such matters, but I hardly think she is *that* much of a fool."

"No, I'm not," said Virginia. She eased herself up toward the head of the bed, panting a little. "You're a Jap. What do you want here? What do you want with my husband?"

"A small matter," said Pingo-Pongo. "He will perform it, and then he will be safe, and he can come back to you and roll over and bark and wave his paws like all other American dogs do."

Virginia said, "You can't—"

"One moment," said Pingo-Pongo. "You are raising your voice just a little bit. It would be so unwise if you did it any more. I forgot to introduce my companion. His name is Alfred. There."

He was standing thickly and solidly in the shadows at the head of the bed on Virginia's side, and the dim light made a futuristically menacing mask of his face.

"He is German," said Pingo-Pongo. "And very stupid—as is only to be expected. But he has enough of the—shall I say?—instinct for self-preservation so that he obeys orders when they are given by his superiors. *Heil Hitler!*"

"Heil Hitler!" said Alfred.

"Do not laugh at him," said Pingo-Pongo. "He actually believes that supreme stupidity. He cannot, I'm happy to say, speak Japanese or English of Spanish or any other civilized language. You must speak to him either in German or in sign language. But really, for a German-brain, he is very quick at sign language. Watch."

Pingo-Pongo put the back of his left hand delicately against his mouth and then pointed at Virginia. Alfred moved as instantly and unquestioningly as a mechanical man. His thick arm flipped out, and there was a sharp slapping sound.

Virginia's head thumped against the head of the bed, and a thin little trickle of blood oozed over her lower lip. Pingo-Pongo's eyes gleamed watchfully under their hooded lids. Morris sat as rigid as a man made of ice.

Pingo-Pongo chuckled. "I'm afraid you are a coward, Mr. Harley. According to all your motion pictures and novels and stories, you must immediately arise and smite the horrid, horrid aliens who have dared to lay hands on your wife. Especially because she is carrying your child. Or is there some more delicate—and typically American—way of speaking of her condition?"

"I am carrying his child," said Virginia.

"What do you want of me?" Morris asked.

"Your time," said Pingo-Pongo. "Only a little of it. Your truck. Your gracious help." With his left hand he made delicate stroking motions against both his sallow cheeks. "What woud you think that meant?"

"I don't know," Morris said.

"You are not German and stupid. Look at Alfred."

Alfred had a knife in his hand. It had a flat, broadly tapered blade that winked in the light.

"Shaving," said Pingo-Pongo. "Razor. Hence—a knife. It is very simple. It would have to be for a German to understand it. Really, I tell you in confidence, we regret things could not have worked out more—ah—cooperatively. The Japanese are a proud people. It is quite disgusting to be paired, however temporarily, with a race of pigs. But I am sure I'm boring you. You will get dressed and come with me now, Mr. Harley."

"No," said Morris.

Pingo-Pongo smiled. "Are you really so stupid as to think I won't kill you if you don't do exactly what I tell you when I tell you to do it?"

"Morrey," said Virginia. "He *means* it."

"Honey," said Morris evenly and slowly, "he wants to use me, not you or—or Jasper. If I stepped out of this room—away from you—Alfred would cut your throat. I'm sorry to talk that way, Honey."

"Oh," said Virginia.

"Please don't be sick."

"I won't be. What—what are you going to do?"

"You should ask me," said Pingo-Pongo. "At the moment I have the deciding vote. It is so fortunate that we understand your national psychology. I expected your reaction, and I know exactly the steps to take to meet it."

"What steps?" Morris asked.

"All Americans are cowards," said Pingo-Pongo quite seriously. "They value their lives, the lives of their wives and children and relatives, their security, much more highly than they do their national or personal honor. That is nice. It makes it so easy for me now. Your husband, Mrs. Harley, is terrified for fear something unpleasant might happen to you. For instance, Alfred's knife— So if I explain to Mr. Harley how he can prevent that he will do anything I say. Isn't that true, Mr. Harley?"

"Yes," said Morris.

"Of course," said Pingo-Pongo. "It is so simple when you understand Americans. Now attend me carefully. I wish to retrieve some property of mine which is buried in the cut beyond your Number 3 shovel. I must get it at once, or the shovel will uncover it."

"What is it?" Morris asked.

"Nitro-glycerine. You see, I am very frank with you. I wish, also, to use your truck to carry the explosive to a safer place of concealment. I am not ready to use it yet. Are you following me?"

"Yes."

"All right. Now I will explain how you can save your wife's life and your own. I cannot appear openly in this area. It is a combat zone, and no Japanese are allowed in it. For instance, I cannot drive your truck. The first person who noticed me would stop me—or attempt to. So I will ride with you—out of sight on the floor of the truck cab—to the gravel pit, and you will help me load the explosive and then drive me back here again. Then I will wait here with you while Alfred drives the truck to a place we have in mind and unloads the explosive. Then he will drive the truck back here, and we will leave you both unharmed."

"Why?" said Morris.

PINGO-PONGO smiled at him. "Why not? Your authorities won't be able to find the explosive or Alfred or me, and

you will have a great deal of difficulty explaining your part in the affair. In fact, I would advise you not to try. You will be late to work, but you can excuse yourself by saying you were attending your wife. Everything will be so simple that way, and you will also avoid the possibility of me—or someone else—paying your wife a return visit. That is a matter for you to consider most carefully."

Morris looked at Alfred.

PINGO-PONGO said, "Alfred will not touch your wife while we are gone unless we do not return with the explosive within the time limit I have set. Really, neither of you will be harmed if you cooperate."

"When we come back," said Morris, "we'll sit out in front in the truck with the motor running until Virginia comes to the door and I can see she's all right. Do you know what I'll do if she isn't?"

Pingo-Pongo chuckled. "I can imagine. You will drive the truck into a lamppost or a tree."

"The truck," agreed Morris, "and the nitro—and you."

"It will not be necessary," said Pingo-Pongo. "I will do exactly as I promised. I will explain your precaution to Alfred." He spoke in quick, gutturals, and Alfred nodded once.

"Honey?" said Morris inquiringly.

"Yes, Morrey. He went awful fast, but I'm sure he didn't say anything but about the truck and you waiting until you saw me."

Pingo-Pongo stared at her, surprised. "You can speak German?"

"Sure she can," said Morris, getting out of bed and pulling off the top of his pajamas. "Two years in high school and two years in business college."

"Most amazing," said Pingo-Pongo. "I must tell Alfred that." He spoke again, more slowly now, and Alfred nodded stolidly. "You understood what I said, Mrs. Harley?"

"Yes. You told him I spoke German and that he was not to answer me if I tried to talk to him."

"It will be better that way, I think. You wouldn't enjoy talking to him anyway. He is very stupid. Are you ready now, Mr. Harley? There will be no one at the gravel pit this early, but if you and your truck should be seen it will not excite suspicion. People will merely think you are working extra hours in your zeal to aid the war effort. Should anyone, for any reason, see me you will explain that I am your new assistant or helper and that I am Chinese."

"All right." said Morris.

"Good-by, Morrey," said Virginia Harley slowly and soberly.

"Keep your chin up, Honey," Morris said. "I'll be back in a flash."

He and Pingo-Pongo went out of the bedroom and across to the kitchen and out on the back porch.

"Wait!" said Pingo-Pongo sharply. "Who is that man digging in the lawn next door?"

"He lives in that new house there," Morris said.

"There was no one living in that house two days ago!"

"He moved in yesterday."

"Is he a friend of yours? Has he visited you?"

"No. He just came over once—to borrow some garden tools. The ones he's using now."

"All right," said Pingo-Pongo. "We understand just how you Americans who live in a small suburb like this talk with your neighbors. You will do and say exactly what I tell you. We will walk on the drive to the garage. You will say, 'Good morning. Looks like a swell day, huh?' He will answer some similar nonsense, and you will say, 'This is my new helper.' I will greet him, and then you will say, 'He's a Chinaman, an' doesn't talk good English.' You will use just the words I have—not any others. Is that clear?"

"Yes," said Morris. " 'Good morning. Looks like a swell day, huh? This is my new helper. He's a Chinaman. He doesn't talk good English'."

"You are a very quick study," said Pingo-Pongo. "That is theater slang for having a good memory. Go ahead now. I will put my gun away and walk close beside you. Your life and your wife's life depends on your absolute obedience."

They went out on the drive. The dawn was a red, fierce glow on the horizon.

The man in the next yard was digging with a gardening fork, and he leaned on it and looked at them. He was a young man with the beginnings of a paunch, and he was bald. He wore a khaki work shirt and khaki pants.

"Good morning," said Morris. "Looks like a swell day, huh?"

"You can have it," said the bald young man.

"This is my new helper."

Pingo-Pongo grinned and giggled and ducked his head. "How-do! How-do, please! Velly fine day!"

"He's a Chinaman," said Morris. "He doesn't talk good English."

"I got ears," said the bald young man.

They had reached the garage, and Morris rolled the patented door up with Pingo-Pongo pretending to help eagerly, and then they were inside and out of sight.

"That was good," said Pingo-Pongo. "He does not suspect anything. He has gone back to his digging. Start the truck. I will sit up on the seat until I am out of sight of your neighbor, and then I will slide down on the floor."

Morris backed the truck down the drive. The bald young man didn't even look up.

"So nice," said Pingo-Pongo. "Drive very carefully, Mr. Harley. If we have an accident or are stopped by a policeman—"

III

THE gravel pit was a great brown scar against the side of the hill, and Shovel Number 3 looked like a prehistoric monster with a girder neck and a box head. Morris drove the truck around beside it and stopped.

"Is there anyone in sight?" Pingo-Pongo asked.

"No. No one."

"Good. Just as I expected." Pingo-Pongo got out of the truck. "Bring the two shovels and come this way."

Morris got the shovels from the clamps on the side of the truck body and followed Pingo-Pongo up the steep face of the cut. Gravel slid and rolled back under their feet.

"Here," said Pingo-Pongo. "Dig in that direction."

Morris braced himself and began to dig. It was warm, even this early, and sweat stained the back of his shirt.

"Careful, now," Pingo-Pongo warned. "Be very careful— All right. Stand aside."

He scraped cautiously with his own shovel and finally uncovered a flat gallon tin that was painted dull brown.

"Yes," he said. "There are nineteen more of these buried in two parallel rows. Be very, very careful of them. This is much more sensitive, even, than ordinary nitro-glycerine. The slightest jar will set it off. If this much of it should explode it would enlarge this gravel pit about ten times in a split second. I do not have to tell you what would happen to us in that event."

They dug the tins out one after the other.

"Twenty," said Pingo-Pongo. "That is all. Now we will carry them to the truck. Carry one in each hand, and don't bump them or jiggle them. Walk on your toes."

They made five trips from the cut to the truck.

"Now," said Pingo-Pongo, "throw in a layer of those fine screenings on the bottom of the truck. About a foot deep."

MORRIS shoveled from the pile of screenings, leveling the fine gravel off on the bed of the truck.

"All right," said Pingo-Pongo. "That is very fine." He climbed up into the truck body. "Now hand me the cans one at a time."

Morris handed up the cans, and Pingo-Pongo worked each one carefully into the gravel, packing them about a foot apart. The seventh can Morris handed up slipped in his fingers just as Pingo-Pongo was reaching for it.

Pingo-Pongo raised his voice for the first time. "Look out, you fool! Look—"

Morris staggered back, juggling the tin. He went down on one knee, but he was grasping the tin safely against his chest with both arms.

There was a sheen of sweat on Pingo-Pongo's face. "You clumsy maniac! If that had dropped— Hand it up here!"

Morris gave him the tin and then the others, handling them much more cautiously now.

"That's all," he said.

Pingo-Pongo jumped down from the truck. "All right. Now we will pile in some of that coarser gravel to hold them and make it look like a regular load and—"

The bald young man slid around the back of the truck. "I wondered how long it was going to be before I could get between you and that nitro." He was holding Morris' new deer rifle, and it was aimed at Pingo-Pongo. "Don't make a move. Don't even bat your eyes."

Pingo-Pongo's voice grated thickly. "You!" he said to Morris. "You signaled him. You disobeyed me."

The morning seemed very misty and dark in front of Morris. "I didn't have to. *He's* my new helper. He knew that you weren't."

"Luck!" Pingo-Pongo gasped. "Always your American luck. The one chance in a million that he should live next to you!"

"No luck about it," Morris said. "I got him the job. I loaned him and his wife their railroad fare to California. I even loaned them the money to make the down payment on their house."

"Don't forget the five dollars for groceries," said the bald young man sourly.

"He's my brother-in-law," Morris said.

"I ain't boastin' about it, though," said Virginia's brother.

PINGO-PONGO blew out his breath in a long sigh. "So—Mrs. Harley's brother! Then, Mr. Harley, you should tell him about what will happen to his sister. About Alfred and his knife—"

"Is Alfred the bird with the muffin-puss that was in Virginia's bedroom?" Virginia's brother asked. "After you and stupid left, I figure he is acting pretty nutty even for him, so I go around to the back door and knock and holler a little. Then I go in the front door with the key he loaned me to keep track of Virginia with, and I am just in time to see Alfred march Virginia out of the bedroom with a knife against her back, on the way to the back door to see who's there." Virginia's brother nodded at Morris. "It's lucky you are so loopy. You remember them toys you bought? Imagine buyin' baseball stuff for a kid that ain't even born yet! Anyway, the bat was standin' in the hall corner, so I slammed Alfred over the dome with it. I bust it. The bat, I mean. I think maybe I bust Alfred, too."

"Virginia?" Morris asked faintly.

"Say, maybe she's your wife, but I was raised with her. You couldn't hurt her with a hand-axe. When I left she was on the phone hollering for the Army and the Navy and the Air Force and President Roosevelt. And if you think them guys with rifles crawlin' around in the weeds up on the hill there are huntin' ducks, you are crazy. They was afraid to tackle Hiro-Hito for fear he'd drop one of those cans, and they seen I was hidin' behind the truck, so they let me handle it." Virginia's brother raised his voice. "Hey, slew-foots, come on down! The Marines has got the situation well in hand."

"Marines?" said Pingo-Pongo incredulously.

"One Marine," said Virginia's brother. "Me. Six years before I was invalided out. Hey, lame-brain! What's the matter with you?"

Morris was swaying gently back and forth.

Pingo-Pongo's smile was like a livid mask. "Mr. Harley is relieved that you saved him from betraying his country."

"Why, you bandy-legged little rumdum," said Virginia's brother. "This guy is my brother-in-law, and he is a dope, but you don't think he was gonna let you get out in the streets with that truck full of nitro, do you? Virginia sure knew that he wouldn't. She was in such a rush for me to get here she wouldn't even let me stop to hit Alfred again. Morrey stalled as long as he could, but he was just about ready to go when I stepped in. You remember that juggling act he put on with the can of nitro? I lost ten years off my life when he was doin' that, and I don't think you liked it so well, either, because you lost track of the number of cans he handed you. He short-changed you. He didn't hand you twenty. He gave you nineteen. There's the other."

With his thumb, without moving the rifle, he pointed under the truck. The flat brown can was under the right rear wheel, tucked in close against the tread of the big tire.

"If you and him had got in the truck," said Virginia's brother, "and drove it forward a quarter of an inch, there'd have been an awful loud noise around here."

Morris fainted dead away; he came down so hard his head bounced.

"Hell's fire!" said Virginia's brother, really worried now. "I hope he ain't hurt himself. Virginia will tear my ears off if he has."

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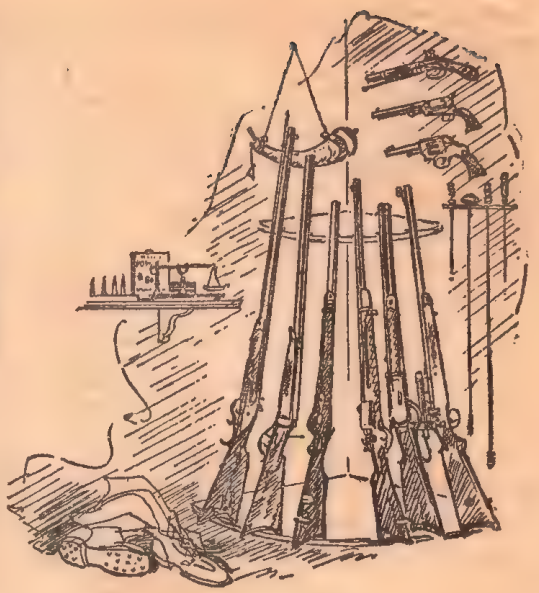

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by
PETE KUHLHOFF

Deer Hunting, 1942

IF YOU have lately been watching the used-gun market (new guns are getting scarcer every day) you will no doubt have noticed advertisements offering "good used" deer rifles in calibers of .38 and over. This means there will be a lot of hunters in the field this season, armed with rifles whose trajectory is something like a rainbow. And if the hunter doesn't know his rifle and is a poor judge of range there will be a lot of cruelly wounded animals to creep away and die a horrible death. (Personally, I would rather never again go on a hunting trip than have a wounded animal escape.)

Let's have a "look see" at the ammunition some of the "caliber .38 and over"

guns shoot. The Winchester ammunition handbook lists exactly nineteen different cartridges in this group. Unless you are an old-timer I'll bet you haven't heard of many of them. The midway trajectories being anywhere from 12 to 38 inches at 300 yards. In other words, if you are shooting a rifle chambered for the .44-40 cartridge and your sights are set to hit where aimed at 150 yards, the bullet will land 38 inches lower at 300 yards. That's quite a drop, and when you consider the fact that the average hunter can't judge range to within 50 yards at that distance,

In the next issue
SHORT STORIES for Nov. 10

•

NEW RIVERS CALLING
by James B. Hendryx

•

ADMIRAL YAMAMOTO'S PRIVATE PLANE
by Andrew A. Caffrey

•

MURDER C. O . D.
by Day Keene

how the heck is he going to bring home any eatin' meat.

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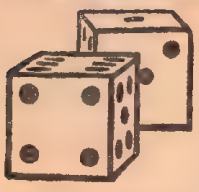

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American School, Dept. H-739, Drexel at 58th, Chicago

miss—or worse yet, you break the buck's leg low down. The dope on all this is that the maximum range at which the .30-30 can be effectively used by a really good shot is actually not over 250 yards. If killing power and all-around performance is considered, 200 yards is about as far out as the .30-30 should be expected to reach. With ordinary factory iron sight equipment, 100 or 150 yards is a much safer expectancy for the average shooter. Don't get me wrong, I'm not condemning the .30-30, it's a swell gun when used within its proper range.

Don't tell me about the old-timer who knocked off his game at half a mile and "it

never moved a muscle." I have heard an old-timer (a relative of mine, at that) tell of bringing down a deer at half a mile with his Winchester .32-20, which, according to him, is the best deer rifle ever. This old hunter had used some of the big Sharps rifles back in the buffalo days and had been a shooter all his life so he should know better than use a .32-20 on deer.

But to get back to these old big bore guns—out of the whole mess there are only a couple I'd care to use at over 100 or 150 yards, namely, the .405 Winchester and perhaps the .401 Winchester self-loading.

The .45-70 and some of the others have certainly brought down a lot of game and will no doubt continue to do so when used by a good shot and experienced hunter.

If you are a new hunter and haven't had a lot of shooting experience, lay off the high trajectory low-power guns, for the chances are, you "won't hit nothin'."

It seems to me that in the interest of conservation and cleaner sport, hunters should pay more attention to a few simple fundamentals. First of all, the hunter should develop reasonable shooting skill out to the point-blank range of his rifle. Then, and not until then, should he attempt longer shots. At this stage, the hunter should learn thoroughly the ballistics of his favorite rifle and ammunition, and learn to judge distances within the permissible degree of error allowed by these ballistics. The maximum limit, or perhaps more accurately, the horizon to his long-range deer-slaying efforts, should in my opinion be set at that point where the bullet from his own pet rifle does not fall more than 20 inches below the line of sight.

This limit coincides fairly closely with the maximum distances at which the various commercial loads can be expected to produce satisfactory kills on deer. If the hunter gets so he can do really consistent killing out to this limit, he will be a first-class shot and if he has self-control enough to stop at this limit he will be a first-class conservationist.

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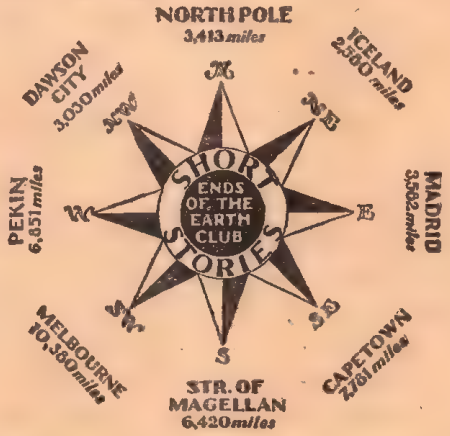

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Expects to Travel

Dear Secretary:

I only started to read SHORT STORIES lately and I made up my mind to join the Ends of the Earth Club immediately. My favorite hobbies are hunting, shooting, camping and aviation. I also like to read, especially narratives by explorers, and I have planned to do some traveling myself in the near future.

Yours truly,
Delbert Denton.

Box 258, New Milford, Penna.

Sea Shells and Photographs

Dear Secretary:

I wish to apply for membership in your Ends of the Earth Club. I have lived on an island in southern Florida most of my life, which isn't very long because I'm in my middle teens.

My favorite sports are swimming, fishing, hunting and softball. My hobbies are collecting sea shells and photographs.

I am willing to correspond with any and everybody.

Sincerely,

Joe Parker.

2123 N.W. Twentieth Street,
Miami, Florida.

A Shut-in Requests Stag Party Invitations

Dear Secretary:

Although I have been a convalescent for some time now, I have always been a regular reader of SHORT STORIES Magazine and, believe me, it has always been a pleasure to read your first-grade articles. The articles have been in my estimation "tops" for the past seven years and one can say this without denial.

In my day I have done a small stint of writing and as a source of comparative short-story writing your magazine leads.

This letter is not intended as a "puff" but is a sincere appreciation of your regular contents month by month. Of course, at times one does find occasional stories which may appear to be lacking in something, but that depends entirely upon one's viewpoint and favoritisms. For an average, however, you have what it takes, and that is good enough for me.

Please send me an identification card, and, if possible, contact readers who would care to send me stag party invitations. A few months ago I thought it a unique idea to compile a collection of stag party cards. I thought it would be different and, believe me, it is. If any of your readers would be so kind to oblige I would appreciate this favor very much. This would help a shut-in a great deal. I don't know how to reciprocate but am sure I can dig up something which may please. Yours truly,

F. A. Macrouch.

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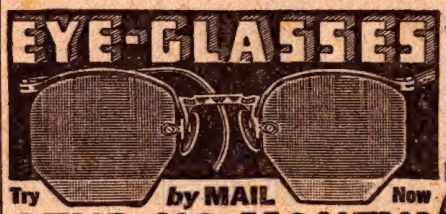

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